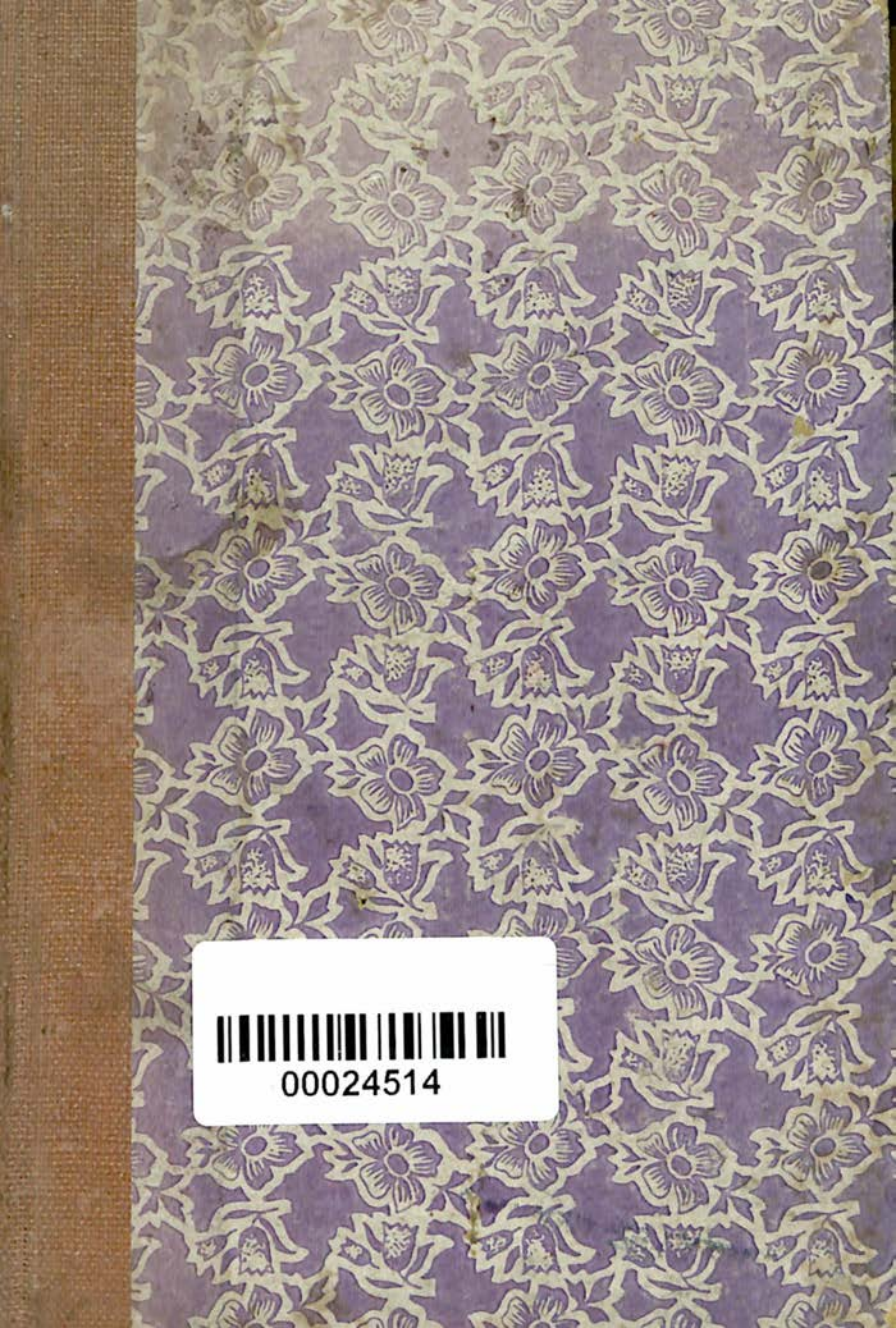
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Frontispiece *From the Graphic History of the War*

LORD ROBERTS IN HIS TENT

LORD ROBERTS

A BIOGRAPHY

BY

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"A WOMAN'S MEMORIES OF THE WAR"
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LORD ROBERTS AT PRETORIA

LORD ROBERTS

CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS

On February 20, in the year 1852, the P. & O. steamer *Ripon* set sail from Southampton, having on board a number of young officers, who were stepping out for the first time into that wider world, to guard and defend which is the proud heritage of every British soldier. India was their goal, that great land surrounded by all the magnificence and mystery of the East, which had been won in the first place for England by a mere handful of men under the leadership of Robert Clive, a clerk in the service of the East India Company, a hundred years before, and which from those days onward had offered a wide field for action and adventure to the keen public-spirited men our army has never failed to produce.

Nowadays a trip to India is a mere nothing, and as many people undertake the journey in a fortnight as would have set out in twelve months fifty years ago. For then the steamers ran seldom and slowly,

and an officer as he said good-bye to home and England, knew that, except in the case of severe illness, it would be ten years at least before he set foot in the old land again.

On this particular ship was a lad of nineteen, small and delicate to look at, so delicate indeed that older people shook their heads and talked of the folly of his facing a tropical climate. But underneath the apparent delicacy lay a vigorous spirit and a wiry constitution, the love of a simple, hardy outdoor life, the hatred of anything like luxury or coddling.

For young Frederick Roberts was every inch of him a soldier's son, and India, the land of his birth, was the land which called him. He came of a fighting and of an Irish stock, and what better combination could be found as an heritage for one destined to be the greatest soldier of his age? His great-great-grandfather, a Huguenot refugee, settled in Waterford, had fought for England at the battle of the Boyne. Two of his uncles had been in the navy; the one, Sir Samuel Roberts, who had been in fifty-three actions, having commenced his adventurous career at the age of eleven, and afterwards had performed deeds of daring which carry us back to the days of the Elizabethan sea-dogs. And his father, Sir Abraham Roberts, who lived to the age of ninety, has been called the "patriarch of Indian Generals," and was a man of strong character, sound sense, and great tact, who won a high reputation for the manner in which he handled critical affairs in Afghanistan,

and who earned for himself the right to be ranked among the builders of the Empire.

Of course Frederick Roberts had always been destined for the Army. He was brought home from India at the age of two, and spent most of his early boyhood at Clifton, though he was for a short while at a little school in Ireland, Carrickmacross, and he was only ten when he went to a Mr. Mills at Hampton, there to be prepared for Eton. His stay at Eton was a short one—only a year; and beyond the fact that he won a prize for mathematics and a reputation for "pluck," and, moreover, cut his name on the wall of the dame's house where he lived, there is little to be told of his Eton days.

But the year spent in that place, so rich in associations, so surrounded by memories of the worthy part which sons of Eton had played in the past, could not fail to make an impression on a mind which was always sensitive to high thoughts and gentle influences, and Eton left its indelible stamp upon him. Thirty-five years later he went back there as the hero of Kandahar to receive a sword of honour from the hands of the captain of the Oppidans and the captain of the Collegers, and in thanking them, he spoke as follows: "While you were thinking of Eton men in Afghanistan, we were not unmindful of the boys in our old school; and during the two years which the campaign lasted, as many of us as could manage it dined together on the 4th of June and wished prosperity to Eton.

Our motto was there, as it is here, 'Floreat Etona!' While we discussed our fights there, we remembered those in Sixpenny, and alluded delicately, and I trust with becoming gratitude, to the switchings we doubtless deservedly received; we also remembered that we were old Etonians, and even between those who were strangers up to then to each other, a friendly feeling was rapidly established, brought about by that freemasonry which is always found among Etonians. To you boys who intend to enter the army, the studies and sports of this place are your best training. England's greatest general, himself an Etonian, is reported to have said that the battle of Waterloo was won in the Eton playing-fields. In thus expressing himself, the duke meant that bodily vigour, power of endurance, courage and rapidity of decision are produced by the manly games which are fostered here."

At the age of fourteen young Roberts went to Sandhurst, which in those happy days had not to be entered by the stiff examination required now. Only a very simple test was necessary, sufficient to prove that the would-be cadet possessed the average education of a boy of his age, and no special army class or cramming had to be faced. Once there, however, an alarmingly severe course of work was laid down, especial stress being set on mathematics, practical astronomy and dynamics, and quite eight hours' class-work a day had to be got through, besides a good deal of drill and practical

work. The full-dress uniform of the Sandhurst cadet too was very gorgeous; a scarlet coatee faced with blue, or ornamented with gold lacings, and a somewhat heavy head-dress of blue with gold ornaments, a red and white plume crowning the whole.

At Sandhurst, Roberts was known by the nickname of "Deductions," on account of his quickness in solving problems from the slightest cue, a characteristic which he has never lost, and which has been of inestimable value to him throughout his life. For nothing escapes his keen blue eyes, and no detail is too trivial for him to pass over unheeded.

After two years at Sandhurst he went on by the wish of his father to Addiscombe, the Academy in which the cadets about to enter the service of the East India Company were specially prepared for India, and at the end of another two years spent there, Roberts came out ninth in a batch of fifty, and obtained the commission on which he had set his heart, in the Bengal Artillery. At Addiscombe, as elsewhere, young Roberts was very popular, though he was never considered brilliant or remarkable in any uncommon way. His rather weak heart was a handicap to him, but he was always cheery and sunny tempered, full of go and courage, warm-hearted, and ready to give a helping hand wherever he could, very hard-working and conscientious, and with a reputation for being extremely smart and neat as regards his clothes.

And so, though the details of his boyhood are scarce, and he himself has not chosen to amplify them in his own charmingly-written autobiography, we can still form some idea of the young officer who stood on the deck of the *Ripon*, full of delight at the thought of joining his father and beginning his active soldier's life, yet admitting himself as being far from cheerful in the knowledge that he was leaving England for a probable ten years.

Nearly fifty years later the same officer, now a field-marshal, set sail from Southampton once again. His hair had become white, and the lines on the face told of hard work and hard living. But the blue eyes were just as bright, the figure was even more alert and well-knit; the boy had given place to the veteran, and yet all the single-hearted enthusiasm of boyhood joined forces with the calm strong courage of manhood. He was an old man, but England had called him. He had given her ungrudgingly the best years of his life and strength, nay, even more, he had given her the only son, who was dearer to him than all. Yet she demanded still something else. This was the hour of failure and darkness, and the motherland turned to her sons for her deliverance. From every quarter of the globe they answered her appeal; from every town and village in Great Britain and Ireland they came in their hundreds. What they needed was a great leader; one who could bring confidence and hope

where for the moment confusion and uncertainty held the upper hand; one who by the power of his own personality could bind together the many separate forces and weld them into a perfect strength.

There was only one man for the task; and now, as ever, he was ready to make any sacrifice for the army he loved and the country he served.

He had reached an age when he might reasonably have expected to have done with a fighting life; he was at that moment broken-hearted at the loss of his only son, who had lived a blameless life and died a hero's death; but neither the weight of years nor sorrow could overwhelm him. Now as ever he was "ready, aye ready" to tread the rough and rugged path of duty, to face the responsibility that lay before him, to undertake the task which was baffling younger men; and all this in no boastful or self-confident spirit, but with that wonderful modesty and simplicity of character which has won for him the love as well as the respect of all who have ever served under him. No wonder that a great sigh of relief and admiration went up from the Empire when it was known that "Bobs" was to start for South Africa without delay; no wonder that we all became enthusiastic about the man who was never so truly worthy of being a nation's hero as in that hour; no wonder that we cheered, though some of us with tear-dimmed eyes, as we saw him rising above his sorrow and setting out

to put new courage into an army well-nigh disheartened.

"There is something that's audacious
In the very name of 'Bobs,'
There's a dare and dash about it
Makes you sort of want to shout it,
So that all the world can hear it
As you cheer!"

But this is looking far on into the future, and we must turn back to the *Ripon* and its passengers as the steamer left Southampton behind and made for Alexandria, the first stage in the journey. Because in those days there was no Suez Canal, and from Cairo to Suez the road lay across the desert for ninety miles, the sea voyage recommencing at the latter place. A conveyance very like a bathing-machine, drawn by mules, and holding six people, was the means by which the eighteen hours' journey through the desert was accomplished; but, close as were these quarters, Roberts and his five friends managed to enjoy their new experience, and fortunately they seem to have been determined only to see the cheery side of things throughout, for on reaching Suez they found a number of people stranded there, the steamer from England of the last month having broken down, and all these had to be accommodated on the already crowded *Oriental*.

He reached Calcutta on April 1, but unfortunately his father was unable to meet him, and could only send him a note telling him to stay at Spence's Hotel, and report himself as soon as possible at the

headquarters of the Bengal Artillery, which was at Dum Dum. This lonely arrival was rather depressing, especially as all the other cadets were met or provided for in some way or another; nor did it tend to cheer up young Roberts when he dined alone at the hotel with an officer whose health had completely broken down under the Indian climate, who looked terribly ill, and who consequently took a very gloomy view of everything. Even when next day he reported himself at Dum Dum, he found that most of the garrison had just embarked for Burma, and that, instead of a large and cheerful mess party, he had only the company of one other subaltern at dinner. He was appointed to a native field battery, and then began a very dull and monotonous routine in a most unhealthy station.

In spite of the fact that many of the senior military men were personal friends of Sir Abraham Roberts, and that he had written to some of them asking them to see something of his boy, no one seems to have taken any notice or to have done anything in the way of giving him a welcome, and Roberts makes no secret of the fact that he felt horribly homesick and quite certain that he could never be happy in India. He was completely cut off from his home life and his old friends, in itself no slight wrench to one so naturally affectionate and sensitive; the climate was depressing, the work monotonous, and, above all, the thought of ten years of this existence weighed down upon him as a

horrible nightmare. For ten years seems a lifetime to the very young. He wrote to his father and begged him to try and get him sent to Burma, where some fighting was to be had, but Sir Abraham wished him to remain where he was for the present, adding, however, that he hoped to get the command of the Peshawur division shortly, and might then possibly be able to send for him. This at least was hopeful, and as he saw a limit to his stay in dreary Dum Dum, Roberts wisely resolved to fight against his depression, and made himself as contented as possible with his present lot. But in his own descriptive words, "My joy was unbounded when my marching orders arrived, and I bade a glad good-bye to Dum Dum."

The prospect of a three months' journey lay before him, over a distance which can now be covered in three days. Still it was a journey full of endless change and variety, and to Roberts, who always went about with his eyes wide open, quick to notice everything new or unusual, it was naturally full of interest. First came a month in a barge towed by a steamer, then as a pleasant change he travelled from Benares to Allahabad in a horse dak. He stopped for a few days at Cawnpore, and again at Meerut, the headquarters of the Horse Artillery; and here, as a result of making the acquaintance of this splendid regiment, with its officers and men all specially picked, with its great reputation, and its effective uniform, Roberts made up his mind never to be satisfied until he had become a horse gunner. After Meerut

came a trip for 600 miles in a doolie, than which a more uncomfortable mode of locomotion can hardly be conceived. Here is an account of the process in his own words: "Starting after dinner, the victim was carried throughout the night by eight men, divided into reliefs of four. The whole of the eight were changed at stages averaging from ten to twelve miles apart. The baggage was also conveyed by coolies, who kept up an incessant chatter, and the procession was lighted on its way by a torch-bearer, whose torch consisted of bits of rag tied round the end of a stick, upon which he continually poured the most malodorous of oils. If the palanquin bearers were very good, they shuffled on at the rate of about three miles an hour, and if there were no delays forty or forty-five miles could be accomplished before it became necessary to seek shelter from the sun in one of the rest-houses provided by the Government at convenient intervals all along the principal route. In these bungalows a bath could be obtained, and sorely it was needed after a journey of thirteen or fourteen hours at a level of only a few inches above an exceedingly dusty road. As to food, the *khansameh*, like 'mine host' in the old country, declared himself at the outset prepared to provide everything the heart of man could desire; when, however, the traveller was safely cornered for the rest of the day, the menu dwindled down to the elementary and universal 'sudden death,' which meant a wretchedly thin chicken, caught, decapi-

tated, grilled, and served up within twenty minutes of the meal being ordered. At dinner a variety was made by the chicken being curried, accompanied by an unlimited supply of chutney and rice."

By slow degrees, and rendered more pleasant by various breaks, including visits to his two half-sisters, the journey was accomplished, and Roberts reached Peshawur in November, where he was almost literally to make the acquaintance of his father, whom he could only remember having seen for a very short while when he was twelve years old. Sir Abraham Roberts was nearly seventy, and therefore, in addition to their being strangers, there was a wide gap in years between father and son. But the older man possessed the kindly cordial manner and the happy knack of entering sympathetically into other people's lives and interests, which are among the most attractive characteristics of the younger, so any shyness there might have been for a moment soon vanished. They found endless subjects and interests in common, and to both of them the next year was a very happy one.

Sir Abraham Roberts knew and understood the people and tribes of the North-West Border, particularly the Afghans, better than any other officer at the time. He realised the difficulties bound to arise from the nearness of these fierce and gallant tribes to our frontier; he foresaw the struggles which must inevitably ensue, and he faced the whole question in a wise and humane spirit. His son, ever eager to learn and get to the fountain-head of every

subject, listened as willingly as Sir Abraham taught, and in this way he gathered together an immense amount of information, all of which was destined to be most valuable to him later on in his career. Never to let an opportunity slip of learning about something, whether its immediate use was apparent or not, has been an unfailing rule with Roberts, and so when responsibility has been laid on him, it has never found him unprepared.

Besides acting as A.D.C. to his father, Roberts did duty with the Mountain Battery of Artillery to which he was attached, and that under a very strict commanding officer, who kept his young subaltern hard at work; and one event which occurred while serving with this battery made a great and painful impression on his mind. He had to attend a flogging parade, at which two fine young Horse Artillery men were given fifty lashes each for selling their kits, a "barbarous and degrading form of punishment" in the eyes of one whose whole life has been spent in trying to raise the dignity and position of the private soldier. "It was hateful to see them thus treated," he wrote; "besides, one felt it was productive of harm rather than good, for it tended to destroy the men's self-respect and to make them completely reckless. How I longed to have the power to remit the fifty lashes!" His major was evidently of the same opinion, for when in defiance the men committed the same offence directly they were set free, and were sentenced to more lashes, he

took the bold line of appealing to their better nature and to their pride in their regiment, offering to counter-order the flogging if they would give their promise not to give cause for complaint again. The men were touched and readily promised, while Roberts, who did not lose sight of them for years, found to his great joy that they became good and reliable soldiers.

Peshawur, being a frontier garrison of great importance, was anything but a safe or quiet station, surrounded as it was by wild and fanatical tribesmen, and Roberts soon saw something of its dangers. For Colonel Mackeson, the Commissioner, "the *beau ideal* of a soldier, cool to conceive, brave to dare, and strong to do," to whom "the frontier was his post and the future his field," was attacked by a fanatic for no reason as he was sitting in his verandah, and died from the dagger wounds a few days later. Sir Abraham and his son were away for a change at a hill station when the murder was committed, but in spite of its being the most unhealthy time in Peshawur, they returned at once, and strong measures were taken without delay to prevent any further trouble. The murderer was hung and his body burnt, this latter course being an awful punishment to Mohammedans, but a very necessary means of preventing the criminal being worshipped as a saint. An extra regiment was also brought in to garrison Peshawur, and the disturbance soon died out. Shortly after fresh

troubles arose, as usual among the hill tribes, and as his battery was ordered forward, Roberts eagerly hoped that his first chance had come of seeing some fighting. There was, however, some delay, as Sir Abraham Roberts was quite ill, and his son had to take him as far as Rawal Pindi, where he had been ordered for change. He started back again at once, riding as hard as he could go for a long journey, and hoping "to be in time for the fun." But the sound of guns in the distance made him fear that after all he would be too late, and this unfortunately turned out to be the case.

The Bori Afridis, against whom the expedition had been made, refused to accept certain conditions which had been agreed to by other frontier tribes respecting the robbing and murdering of our subjects, and consequently a force had to be sent to destroy their villages and subdue them, a task accomplished with very little loss on our side. But what impressed Roberts was the great danger of trusting so implicitly in the tribesmen who practically held the ridges all around, and consequently the lines of communication, however friendly they might profess to be; and as he returned from this expedition with the force, he foresaw the disasters which might easily happen from over confidence in these uncertain allies. In this and in many other ways he stored up experience for future use.

Though disappointed in missing a fight, a great

pleasure was shortly in store for him, for he was "given the jacket" on which he had set his heart, which meant that he was promoted to the Royal Horse Artillery, and best of all, to a troop stationed in Peshawur. The Lord Roberts of to-day still becomes enthusiastic when the word Irish is mentioned, so nothing could have pleased him better than to find that his new troop was made up almost entirely of Irishmen, fine, tall specimens of their race too, who lost their hearts on the spot to "little Roberts." "Bobs is little, but where is there a big 'un that can touch him for pluck?" is a well-known criticism of Tommy Atkins on his beloved Chief, and the dashing horse gunners soon learnt to gauge the spirit of their new officer. To become a fine rider was his first object, among other reasons that he might learn to understand all that goes to the making of a good Horse Artillery driver. So he rode the high-spirited horses in turn, and the more unruly they were, the more resolutely he stuck to them, till he could sit them perfectly. In his own simple way of looking at things, a special advantage of this was that it brought him into constant contact with the men, an advantage which cannot be over-estimated, tending as it must do to the development of that best kind of feeling, in which perfect discipline, and a personal affection between officers and men, join hands.

But this determination to become a perfect horse-

man had another value, as Roberts learnt when acting on the staff of different generals, for which task to be a first-rate rider was an all important qualification.

Several attacks of fever ended in his being sent on sick leave to Simla, and there he made the acquaintance of Colonel Becher, the Quartermaster-General, a keen judge of men, who was very much struck with young Roberts' unassuming manner, and his evident interest in his profession, and who expressed a hope to have him some day on his staff. A staff appointment in the Quartermaster-General's department was the first step to success in the eyes of any ambitious officer, and at the very thought of such good fortune Roberts went back to Peshawur in high spirts, never dreaming that the realisation of his hopes lay near at hand. A year later, however, a post was offered him which would not necessitate his leaving his regiment, and everything was apparently successfully arranged, when an obstacle was raised by the Governor-General, who refused to confirm the appointment because Roberts had not passed an examination in Hindustani. This refusal seemed all the harder because the examination test had been very rarely applied to temporary appointments of this sort.

But Roberts was not the man to be baffled easily. The examination was in July and it was then May; so, engaging the best possible teacher, he shut himself up to work with great determina-

tion, passed successfully, and took up the appointment.

One more characteristic incident of this time.

A move had to be made to a fresh camp, and Roberts was sent out to prospect and choose a suitable, healthy site, near water. On leaving the old camp in the early dawn, Roberts saw that, in spite of his instructions, the officer in command of the advance guard was taking the wrong direction, and was, moreover, supported by the brigadier and other officers. He felt so certain of his ground, that he said if the intended direction was followed, the troops would have to march at least seven miles out of their way, whereupon the brigadier ordered him to lead the way as he was so sure of it, and laid the whole responsibility upon his shoulders. The country was desolate and devoid of any landmarks, the majority of the officers emphatically declared that they were on the wrong road, and at last even the brigadier suggested to Roberts that he too had lost his way. But he stood to his point; before long they had all to own themselves mistaken, while the young staff officer earned for himself the useful reputation of possessing the bump of locality, and when he rejoined his regiment a few months later, he had won golden opinions from the senior officers under whom he had served.

CHAPTER II

THE BROODING OF THE STORM

In the early months of 1857 there began to appear in the sky those clouds, at first no bigger than a man's hand, which quickly burst with such awful consequences on a Government unprepared to face the storm, blind even to the fact that the dark clouds had any significance. This is no history of the Indian Mutiny, with its thrilling records in which are bound up together such tragedies and errors, humiliations and disasters, heroic deeds and glorious triumphs as have been rarely crowded into one short campaign. But the story of the next few months is so linked on to any story telling of Roberts, that separation is impossible, and therefore I will try to give you a glimpse of those vivid days which were an epoch in the life of every soldier taking part in them.

The India which Great Britain controls to-day covers an area of close on one million six hundred thousand miles, and has a population of two hundred and eighty-seven millions. A hundred years before the Mutiny broke out, our position there was only that of a few traders and officers, sent out by the East India Company, and our power there was less

than that held by France. The Company itself was simply a large business concern, possessing a certain number of settlements in which it was allowed to trade by the native rulers, the chief of these settlements being at Bengal, Calcutta, and Madras. Then came an attempt on the part of the French to oust the British traders, and taking advantage of the fact that the various native princes and rulers were all quarrelling among themselves as to who should hold the chief supremacy, Dupleix, the French Governor, joined forces with a powerful native prince. An important result of this alliance was to show how great might be the power of drilled white soldiers, even if few in numbers, over native troops.

This was realised by Dupleix, and realised also by Robert Clive, a young clerk in Madras, "an idle, dare-devil of a boy," who had failed at many things, abominated office work, and had twice tried to commit suicide. At the first sign of fighting, he threw up his work and joined our forces as a volunteer, and with extraordinary rapidity he came to the front, not only as a great organiser, but as a great soldier in the field. His successes followed each other, and his brilliant deeds won him a great name both in England and India. With a few hundred mixed troops he held Arcot for fifty days against thousands; a born leader of men, he attracted to himself by his personal gallantry those natives who had never before believed in the fighting powers of the English. The terrible cruelty perpetrated at

Calcutta, where a hundred and fifty British prisoners were suffocated in the Black Hole, was an additional challenge, and at Plassey, Clive with less than a thousand European troops, and about two thousand natives, met and conquered Surajah Dowlah, who led a force of nearly seventy thousand men.

With the victory of Plassey began the British rule in India. Clive, who spent some time in England as a Member of Parliament, returned to India as a Governor, and set himself to the difficult task of fighting those opportunities for corruption, oppression, and extortion, which offered so great a temptation to those in whose hands lay the power. To his efforts are owed two important rules, which are now strictly adhered to, and which forbid any one holding office under the Government in India to accept payment from those they govern, or to engage in any trade for their own benefit. Drastic reforms of this character were not calculated to make him popular, and so violent were the attacks made on him at the end of his life, that proud, sensitive, and unbalanced as he was, he could not stand up against them, and he died by his own hand, having at least accomplished some of those "great things" of which in his boyhood he had dreamed himself to be capable.

But Clive, single-handed, had dug down and fixed foundation stones, and the building slowly progressed, though the people of England knew wor[illegible]

fully little, and cared less, about anything that happened in far away India. The War of American Independence, the struggles with Napoleon Bonaparte, the exploits of Wellington and Nelson, and finally the Crimean War itself, were all events which came much nearer home and affected men more closely. England was still ringing with the echoes rejoicing over Crimean victories, was even giving a thought to some worthy manner of celebrating the centenary of Clive's triumph at Plassey, when the thunder-cloud burst, and the Mutiny in India broke out.

That the whole affair came upon England with startling suddenness is not to be wondered at altogether, for those were not the days of cheap postage, endless newspapers, lightning cables or fast ships, and there was very little coming and going between the two shores. But the blindness of the Government in India, which seemed unwilling or unable to see anything that did not lie on the immediate surface, and which complacently published the most satisfactory reports, telling of a prospering country, a well-organised rule, and a contented people, remains to this day amazing. All that can be said in excuse, lies in the fact that there were no means by which public opinion could express itself, or force itself to be heard, and only where this is possible can there be a sympathetic understanding between the rulers and the ruled.

The British Government in India had the best

intentions, and was served by capable, public-spirited men, but their task was too great for there to be any really satisfactory supervision of those in the lesser positions of responsibility; their lives were isolated and apart from those of the millions of people they controlled, and any signs of discontent were at once pushed aside as being nothing but outbreaks of religious fanaticism, or met with that serene self-confidence which has more than once cost us a heavy price as a nation.

Thus it came to pass that the feelings, wishes, and opinions of the natives had been very little taken into consideration, nor had it been understood how all-important in their eyes were many points which to Europeans were trivial and quite meaningless. Year after year some new province had been conquered or annexed; in many cases the time had as yet been too short for any of the benefits of civilised rule to be felt; while, on the other hand, the sting and humiliation of defeat were memories fresh and vivid. The people of India, divided as they were into many different races, religions, and interests, still possessed, especially in the presence of anything which they held to be common danger, many deep-rooted characteristics which bound them together, and, whatever might be their differences between each other, there were many far more important differences between them and ourselves. Within the last few years they had seen the Punjab conquered; the great province of Oude had been

annexed, and sixteen principalities had been brought under British rule. Now, just as was this rule, and horrible as had been the misgovernment and oppression of the Nawab of Oude, the strong policy of Lord Dalhousie, then Viceroy, which was carried out in a somewhat high-handed fashion, was not calculated to win the confidence of even the loyal and friendly states, and among all classes there was a not unnatural feeling that the English meant to go on seizing, and that in time the old customs and religions, as well as the old races, would be swept away.

So there was a very widespread feeling of discontent, shared by many different races, and in addition to this, different classes had their own special grievances.

The Mohammedans, proud and intensely bound up in their religion, hated Christians, and were ever rebels at heart; other races, fighting and ambitious felt that but for the British they might have obtained the upper hand, and so on. In many different places, therefore, a train of dissatisfaction was laid, as a train of gunpowder, waiting only for a match to cause the explosion.

There is another sidelight, too, which had an important bearing on the whole.

As year by year the British possessions had extended, the native army had been correspondingly increased, while the British troops had varied very little in numbers. Indeed, in Bengal, there were

twenty sepoys to every English soldier, and at the time of the Crimean War our garrison was even further reduced, while the discipline in the native army was very lax. Flogging in native regiments had been abolished by our own regulations for many years, and yet the sepoys constantly saw British soldiers punished in this degrading way. Small wonder that they began to look down on the white men, and to pride themselves on their superior strength. With such a state of things in the air, every new move on the part of the Government became an unintentional influence in the direction of the explosion. Railway and telegraph wires were looked upon with the deepest suspicion, as was every improvement introduced, while all sorts of wild rumours were eagerly seized on and believed, including one that the whole British army had been cut up in the Crimea, and another that an ancient prophecy had foretold an ending of the British rule in the year 1857.

It was in the early part of that year that vague stories began to reach the ears of the military authorities with reference to a great dislike shown by the sepoys towards a new pattern cartridge, issued by the Government with the new rifle just introduced. The men were sulky and insubordinate, in some stations bungalows were burnt, the places where the arms and ammunition were kept were burst open, and, in some cases, even officers were attacked and wounded. And yet no notice was

taken of these warnings, while British officers would not hear a word said against the loyalty of their men. The grievance against the new cartridge was a simple one, and serves as an excellent illustration of the foolish manner in which the superstitions and faiths of a very fanatical people were trifled with by the Government.

Hindus and Mussulmen, of whom the sepoy army was largely composed, held strongly to the belief that they would lose caste, and become defiled, if the fat of a cow or a pig passed their lips. In using the new cartridge, a piece had to be bitten off the end before ramming it home down the barrel, and to make this ramming home more easy still, the cartridge was freely covered with grease. This grease was made up with pig's fat and cow's lard, and a workman in the factory where the cartridges were manufactured, who had quarrelled with a sepoy, publicly taunted him with the fact that in biting the greased end, he, and all the army, lost caste and became defiled. At first the officers believed such a blunder to be impossible and warmly denied it, but when it became evident that the contractor had used this fat undetected, the denial only further irritated the men, who believed that at the back of it all was a determination to force the Christian form of religion on them. The whole affair was a mistake, and an unintentional one, neither was it the cause in itself of the Mutiny, but its effects were immediate and disastrous.

Roberts was at Peshawur, acting as Deputy-Assistant-Quartermaster-General, when on the evening of May 11, the telegraph signaller rushed excitedly into the mess with a telegram from Delhi, to all stations in the Punjab, which told that a very serious outbreak had occurred at Meerut the evening before; that the native soldiers from Meerut had marched on to Delhi, where they had been joined by other regiments, and that several officers had been murdered. For the moment there was great consternation, but fortunately among those in authority at Peshawur were several men who, though young, were prompt and strong in any line of policy they adopted, and staggering as was the news received, they were not long in deciding on their immediate action. The General and the Commissioner must know the facts at once, but otherwise the greatest secrecy was necessary, as the consequences would become still more serious if the news leaked out at once to the sepoys in the garrison.

Nothing could have been more fortunate for Roberts from the point of view of his career, than that at such a moment and in such a crisis, he should have been associated with men, all of whom were remarkable for their intelligence and their force of character. Sydney Cotton, Edwardes, Neville Chamberlain, and above all John Nicolson, stand out in those dark days as men of might who did not fail or falter in the hour of danger.

Edwardes and Nicolson sent to the post office and took possession of all the native letters, which showed clearly enough that the outbreak at Meerut was no isolated event but part of a great scheme, in which every sepoy in the garrison was practically ready to join. The insult of the greased cartridges was continually referred to, and it was quite evident that no regiment in the garrison could be relied on. A hasty meeting was called by the General, at which Roberts, being a staff officer, was present on duty to write down the decisions arrived at. The task which lay before this emergency committee was highly critical. Could they, in the Punjab, with not more than 15,000 troops, hold their own against more than four times that number of natives; could the frontier chiefs and soldiers be counted upon to stand loyally by them, even if it came to siding against the Hindustanis; could the Hindustani regiments be quickly separated before any further mischief was done? Nothing impressed Roberts more than the quiet way in which Edwardes and Nicolson faced the situation. They realised the dangers to the full; they knew, too, that weakness and hesitation at that moment meant utter disaster; and though they were both by profession more civilians than soldiers, they had already thought out definite proposals to lay before the committee. The wisdom of their policy was recognised and cordially approved of, and it was decided to at once organise a movable column of troops who could

be trusted, and whose duty it would be to proceed to any part of the Punjab where there was a mutinous outbreak, and to go to the relief of any garrison where help was needed. On the officer commanding this column great things depended, and breaking through red tape, the committee wisely decided to choose the best man for the work instead of settling the matter by seniority. Colonel Neville Chamberlain was unanimously chosen, and to young Roberts' amazement and delight, offered to take him with him on the staff.

"The most wonderful piece of good fortune that could have come to me," are his own words.

Under any circumstances he would have seen some fighting at this time, but the advantages of tasting active service under the immediate eye of so fine an officer as Neville Chamberlain were obvious, and gave the chance of a lifetime to any one worthy of the opportunity. Nor was "little Roberts" likely at any time to fail where he was trusted, for that he proved himself reliable in addition to being smart and keen, was one important reason why he invariably passed on from one staff appointment to another.

Directly the committee broke up, Roberts was ordered to write out telegraphic messages explaining the course of action to be taken, which messages were to be at once sent off to all commanding officers in the Punjab, and as it was of the greatest importance that no hint of their contents should fall into

native hands, he was to go to the office and see them sent off himself. He was naturally pleased at this further sign of confidence, but later on in that day he passed through a bad quarter of an hour, for Nicolson came round to his house, told him that in some way or another the decisions of the committee had become known, and went on to say Roberts, being the youngest and least experienced soldier, was the one on whom the blame fell, as no older man would have been so indiscreet. To be accused of betraying a confidence, especially at such a time, was a slur both on his honour and his common sense, and Roberts very indignantly denied the whole thing, and was really distressed that it could have been thought likely he would act in such a manner. That Nicolson could doubt him was an additional pang, for though it was but a few weeks ago since he had first met that wonderful man, the impression made on his mind had been a powerful one, amounting to little short of hero worship. Nicolson, too, had been greatly attracted to Roberts, and was quickly satisfied that the blame did not lie with him. Still the matter had to be sifted and cleared, and together they went to the telegraph office, where the signaller, a boy, frightened out of his wits at the searching questions put to him, admitted that he had let out the secret to a friend.

So Roberts was honourably acquitted, and Nicolson, as if to make up for the momentary slur cast on him, went out of his way to be kind, and thus from

an incident which might have been unfortunate in its lifelong effects, nothing but good resulted.

As Nicolson was the man above all others who stands out prominently in those days, and whose strong character influenced every one with whom he came in contact, Roberts included, a short sketch of him will not be out of place; for any attempt to tell the story of a life or career would be incomplete that did not also tell something of those intimacies and friendships which are perhaps the surest clues and the simplest explanations of many events.

The effect of a friendship on a life can never be lightly passed over, especially in such a case as this, when Roberts, young, ambitious, single-hearted, and open to any strong influence, came under the spell of one of whom he could say, "He impressed me more profoundly than any man I had ever seen before or have ever met since. I have never seen any one like him. He was the *beau ideal* of a soldier and a gentleman. Intercourse with this man amongst men made me more eager than ever to remain on the frontier, and I was seized with ambition to follow in his footsteps. . . . Above all others I had for him the greatest admiration and the most profound respect."

Nicolson had come out to India as a cadet in the Bengal Infantry when he was barely seventeen, and eventually joined the 27th Native Infantry. Daring and impetuous, fearless and independent, standing over six feet high; with a very white face and grey eyes, which one moment were calm and searching,

the next were flashing tiger-like; reserved and silent in manner, he was always out of the ordinary, and he had first made a reputation for gallantry in the siege of Etanzi, where at last, however, the British garrison had been forced to surrender under circumstances which the Commander-in-Chief declared "could neither be altered nor alleviated." By the time he was twenty he had seen enough of war and its suffering to make him perfectly hardened to any bodily inconvenience, somewhat hardened, too, in mind, and swayed by a fierce, uncompromising hatred of the Afghans. "I cannot," he said, "describe their character in words too strong. From the highest to the lowest every man of them would sell both country and relations." A few months later he had become adjutant of his regiment, a post which gave him the work he desired and the scope he deserved.

Henry Lawrence, another fine figure of those days, sympathetic, high souled, and free from any petty jealousy, was drawn to Nicolson from the moment he made his acquaintance, and felt him to be one who was capable of great things. Thanks to his interest and recommendation, the Governor-General offered Nicolson a responsible post, "as a step to something better," which he accepted on the condition that he might return to his old position if he did not get on with his new work. The post was not an interesting one, and meant a lonely exile in Kashmir, drilling wild Dogre troops on European methods, but the "something better" was an ap-

pointment on the North-West frontier agency, where Lawrence, aided by picked men, was trying "to teach the Sikh and Mohammedan officers some plain elementary lessons of good government." Rebellions, disturbances, and treachery were the enemies which John Nicolson had to face unceasingly, and from every quarter during the years which followed, so that it was under circumstances of peculiar danger that he rose nobly to the situation.

"Full of noble self-reliance, possessing an unusual share of physical courage, and an unwavering confidence in the presence and protection of God, he was almost invincible," is the criticism of one who was in close contact with him through those days, while his extraordinary daring made him the idol of the natives, who held him to be a god come down to earth. They feared him, and knew his displeasure to be a terrible thing, yet they worshipped him. At his side was always to be found a tall Pathan servant, who never left him, slept outside his tent, stood behind him at mess, a loaded revolver in his hand. This man had been taken prisoner once and had been rescued by Nicolson, who himself, the finest swordsman in India, had cut his way through the enemy, rescued the Pathan and carried him back safely across his saddle-bow. And endless were the stories of gallant deeds he had done, of miraculous, hair-breadth escapes, of power he wielded as if by magic, all of which lifted him above the level of mortal men in the eyes of the natives.

When affairs became more settled in the Punjab, and Nicolson went back as deputy commissioner to govern the Sikhs, against whom he had so fiercely contended, they received him with enthusiasm as "the great sahib, the great warrior," and a new religious sect sprang into being, of which he was the god. Nor could any severe measures on the part of Nicolson curb the fervour of these worshippers. When they prayed to him he had them flogged, a punishment they accepted in the spirit of martyrs. "Our god knew we did wrong, and therefore justly he punished us," was their only reply. Henry Lawrence continued to be his most loyal friend, and while appreciating fully the great gifts and fine, sincere character of the young commissioner, he constantly wrote him wise and kindly words of advice, which were always accepted in the right way.

"Learn to bear and forbear with natives as well as with Europeans," he wrote on Nicolson's appointment, "and you will be as distinguished as a civilian as you are as a soldier. Don't think it necessary to say all you think to every one. The world would be a mass of tumult if we all gave unasked candid opinions of each other. I admire your sincerity as much as any man can do, but say this much as a general warning. From what I saw lately in camp I think you have done much towards conquering yourself, and I hope to see the conquest completed." To which Nicolson answered with very many thanks:

"I do endeavour to overcome my faults of temper, and I hope with increasing success, for I readily admit my temper is a very excitable one, and wants a good deal of curbing." Another great friend of Nicolson was Sir Herbert Edwardes, sunny tempered, clear minded, and deeply religious, and of this intimacy Lady Edwardes wrote years afterwards, when death had once more united them both: "They were more than brothers in the tenderness of their lives, and the fame and interests of each other were dearer to them both than their own."

Neville Chamberlain and Nicolson were at heart the best of friends, though a misunderstanding owing to a letter which miscarried, was the cause of a quarrel between them, which gave peace-making John Lawrence some trouble to smooth away. "Two such good soldiers," he said, "ought not to be in a state of antagonism." But "old Nick was a stern, uncompromising chap," and for some time he held back, even when Chamberlain came forward generously "to meet him with both hands." But at last Lawrence touched the soft point, and when Nicolson saw how he had misjudged his friend, his sorrow was intense, his humility touching in the extreme.

In 1856 Nicolson was appointed deputy commissioner at Peshawur, with Herbert Edwardes as his chief, an arrangement which delighted them both, and was most fortunate in its issues, for in the troublous times so soon to come, their confidence and understanding of each other gave to each a fuller

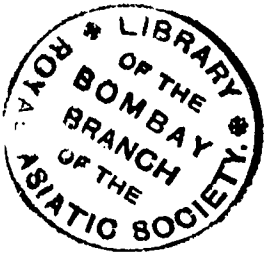
strength. In the few months he spent there he made a mark never to be forgotten. Strong, capable, indefatigable as a worker, almost unerring in his judgments; just, and single-hearted, his power was felt in every department, and, in the words of a native chief, "the sound of his horse's hoofs was heard from the Attock to the Kheibar."

This then was the man who so impressed Roberts with his calm strength at the critical moment, and who was first of all proposed as the best civil and political officer to go with Chamberlain's movable column. Sir John Lawrence, however, held that there was more important work for him to do in Peshawur for the present, and here he remained in a post of great responsibility while Edwardes went on to Rawal Pindi to meet Reed and Chamberlain, and to come to the conclusion that "matters were growing worse every day, and that whatever may have been the immediate cause of the mutiny, it had settled down into a struggle for empire under Mohammedan guidance, with Delhi for its centre."

In Peshawur itself only one course was possible —the sepoy regiments must be disarmed. The colonels of the various regiments were unshaken in their confidence in their men, whom they pledged themselves would be found loyal, faithful to death, and they pleaded earnestly that the disarming should not take place. In reply, Nicolson handed to them the letters seized in the post office, showing every

regiment to be steeped in treachery. "These will interest you," he remarked laconically.

After that nothing more could be said, but the sight was a most painful one. The men were taken altogether by surprise, and so no plan for revolt had been made. Silently, sullenly they piled arms, and their officers, broken-hearted, tore off their own spurs and flung down their swords. But the taking of this extreme measure proved to be the only step which could have averted a terrible disaster.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CHAPTER III

TOWARDS DELHI

"At any cost, Delhi must be regained."

This was the opinion held by Colonel Neville Chamberlain, who with his staff was at Lahore, the place to which European refugees were crowding from all parts of the Punjab, and therefore needing the protection of some strong force. So hurried had been the move from Peshawur, that Roberts had left all his belongings, except his personal kit, in his old quarters there, little guessing that he would never take up again his life and duty there. But pleasant as that life had been, this was the real thing worth having in a soldier's career, though for the moment being a staff officer meant a great deal of writing and routine office work.

To understand the events which guided the movements of Chamberlain's column, we must turn to Meerut, the cradle of the mutiny. The 3rd Light Native Cavalry, stationed there, had been among the first regiments who had refused to use the new cartridges. In vain had their colonel paraded them and explained that they were not required to bite off the end with their mouths, but only to tear it off with their fingers, which could not in any way degrade

them. Still the men respectfully enough, but decidedly, refused to touch them. Only one course remained open to the colonel, under circumstances so strange and unprecedented. Every man who refused was put under arrest, to await trial by court-martial, and the matter was reported to the general. In due time the trial took place, the court being composed of native officers, who found the prisoners guilty, and declared that the cartridges might be used without any fear by Hindus and Mussulmen. The sentences were read out on parade, before all the troops quartered in Meerut, and varied from imprisonment for life to imprisonment for ten years. Chains were at once put on the prisoners, and they were led away, cursing the colonel and appealing to their comrades to help them. But outwardly there was perfect order among the native troops, the result probably of a strong British force being present.

Unfortunately this apparent indifference lulled the officers into believing that the danger was over. Warnings were given, but they were disregarded. A native officer managed to tell Lieutenant Gough that on the next day, which was Sunday, the native regiments intended to rise and set free their comrades; an easy task enough, for, with fatal confidence, only a native guard had been set over the prisoners. Gough at once reported the news to his colonel, who treated it as ridiculous nonsense, and told him he ought to know better than to take any notice of such silly gossip.

And so the fateful Sunday dawned.

To outward appearance all was calm, and the Europeans went to church as usual, and so were more apart from the natives than on any other day, when they would have been about the streets and bazaars. They knew nothing of the fact that the soldiers in the native lines were in a great state of suppressed excitement, that men of all classes were arming themselves, that wild, desperate characters were flocking into the town, and that hatred of the English, added to a passion for plunder, were working their worst.

Suddenly, just before the hour of evening service, the sound of rifle shots and bugle calls, the sight of fire and smoke ascending from the native lines, of "sepoys, absolutely a maddened crowd of fiends and devils, dancing and leaping frantically about, yelling to each other, blazing away into the air in all directions, thirsting for the blood of their officers and of all Europeans," made it painfully clear to even the most sanguine, that the moment was one of extreme danger.

The British officers gallantly went towards their men, hoping, rather than believing, that the old sense of discipline might after all prevail, but they were quickly disillusioned. One passion, and one passion only, had taken possession of the fierce sepoys. Colonel Finnis, who hitherto had been most popular with his soldiers, was killed, simply "riddled with bullets," as were seven other officers

and several women with their children. Here and there officers were saved from death by the splendid loyalty of some native soldiers, but this was always a purely personal matter; no entreaties or persuasions could hold the men back from their comrades. "To Delhi, to Delhi," was their frantic cry, and having released the prisoners and seized all the arms and ammunition, to Delhi they set out, at which place the rebels from all the country round were gathering themselves together.

So sudden, so unlooked for, so awful was the catastrophe, that the military authorities in Meerut appeared paralysed and nothing was done, although there, a fairly large force of British troops was available and was quickly got under arms. The general commanding was an old man, and there seem to have been no bold young spirits on his staff, such as faced the crisis so firmly at Peshawur. Indeed the three native regiments had fled from the town and were well on their way to Delhi, untouched and unpunished, before any one in authority realised their departure. Major Rosser, of the Carabineers, begged that with his squadron of cavalry and some horse artillery guns, he might be allowed to give chase to the enemy, and follow them if necessary up to the walls of Delhi; but permission was refused him. Whether or not this gallant charge would have made any real difference to the situation it is difficult to guess. One distinguished officer, an eye-witness of all that happened, declares

that the moral effect of a dashing charge never failed to impress the natives, and so more than probably, Delhi might have been saved. Lord Roberts, however, looking back on those days, thinks that very little could have been done then by the pursuit. Some hours earlier prompt strong measures within Meerut might have helped to stay the torrent, and the inaction then was disastrous. But the Carabineers, only recently arrived in India, were for the most part recruits with unbroken horses, and the native cavalry had been given too great a start for there to be much chance of their being overtaken. Besides on this one point every one is agreed—the sepoys had determined to revolt, and knowing themselves to be vastly superior as regards numbers, they had every confidence in themselves and were not to be held back.

So to Delhi the native cavalry hastened on, and behind them marched the native infantry. They crossed the river in the early morning, burnt down the tolls-house, killed the toll-keeper, and surged round the palace of the old king, shouting that they had murdered all the English in Meerut, and were come to fight for the Faith and to restore him and his race to their ancient power. Then followed another awful massacre. All the native regiments within Delhi joined the mutineers, who cut down every European—man, woman, or child—whom they could find, burnt their houses and murdered the officers. Anything more ghastly and awful than

the scenes which took place cannot be imagined, and the only light comes from the deeds of heroism which did not fail even in that terrible moment when our officers waited in vain for the reinforcements which never came.

Where in all our history has there been anything more gallant than the blowing up of the powder-magazine by Willoughby, a boy lieutenant? At all costs, the ammunition must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. So he, with two other officers and six British soldiers, nine men in all, made up the little party which were called on to defend the magazine with their lives against overwhelming odds.

They barricaded the outer gates, brought out the guns, and stood there, ready to fire off the 6-pounders, while two or three of their number laid the train from the powder-magazine, which was to be fired when further defence was hopeless. The king sent and demanded their surrender, a demand which was met by a contemptuous refusal. Then came a second message, if the stores were not at once given up ladders would be sent and the magazine would be seized. Willoughby still stood firm, and soon he saw that the scaling-ladders had arrived, that the black figures were crowding, like exultant fiends, over the walls. Still counting on help from Meerut, the defenders held out, calmly and coolly they poured forth round after round of grape shot, and held the enemy at bay. But there were only

nine of them, and when the available ammunition had been spent, who could be spared to bring up more from the magazine?

Closer and closer came the shrieking hosts; two out of the nine were wounded, and it was evident that further defence was hopeless. Death was possible, but surrender—never!

The signal was given, the train was fired, there was a noise which shook the town to its foundations, the report of a great explosion, and men knew the magazine had been blown up. Five out of the nine were killed. Willoughby, blackened by smoke, bruised and wounded, escaped as if by a miracle. Hundreds of sepoys fell, and though it was not possible to destroy at one blow the whole of that great magazine, a valuable deed had been done, the real greatness of which cannot be set forth in words, for it was at the same time an inspiration to all those who were fighting against so many and so great dangers, and an heritage of glory to the army under whose name it was performed.

In every part of the city such defensive preparations as were possible were attempted, but when it became clear that no European troops were on their way, every restraint on the part of the sepoys was thrown off, and nothing but flight remained for those who were prepared to venture an escape, of which all that could be said was, that it was not altogether hopeless, while to remain in Delhi meant certain death. To strong and active men the diffi-

culty of getting away was not insuperable, but they had women and children to take with them, and this doubled the risk. A drop of thirty feet had to be made into a ditch, and with round shot falling all round them, some of the officers got into this, to receive the women who were lowered down to them by belts hastily joined together. Then came the difficulty of climbing up the steep bank on the other side, where the soil was so loose that over and over again they fell back; and thus men and helpless women rolled back to the bottom of the ditch amid a shower of crumbling earth. But at last they reached the top, and groped their way in the darkness to the British Cantonment, on the ridge outside, where at least they found some few horses and carts which could help them to make good their escape.

And so they struggled on together towards Meerut amid hardships, dangers, and sufferings, to the like of which Englishwomen have rarely been exposed. Some fell by the way, but it is good to know that men and women vied with each other in the doing of brave and unselfish deeds, and that at last most of the little company reached Meerut.

Meanwhile those few who had lingered behind in Delhi, about fifty in all, were murdered, and by May 16th not a single English man, woman, or child was to be found there. "The sorrow," it has been said, "was in Delhi, the shame in Meerut." The band of Englishmen in Delhi had to face six rebel regiments, and a population of 150,000, all only too ready to join

in the massacre of white men, while the king and those about him were powerless or unwilling to save them. For many hours they made the best defence they could, buoyed up with the knowledge that British troops lay near at hand, and must assuredly be hastening with all speed to their rescue. But when they realised that no help was at hand, what remained for them save to escape with their bare lives?

So far the sepoys had triumphed all along the line. We had been driven out of the Mogul capital without having made any resistance worthy of the name, for the isolated deeds of heroism had been powerless to stave off the end, and it was small wonder that the violent, fanatical sepoys were flushed with their success, and for the moment were held back by no fear of punishment. Neither is it to be wondered at that Colonel Neville Chamberlain and those of his colleagues who realised the true gravity of the situation, should make it their first and foremost aim "at any cost to relieve Delhi." It is easy enough to blame individuals, and lay the responsibility of this fatal "do nothing policy" on one officer or another. A less easy but a more just way of explaining it, lies in remembering, that as a nation our besetting sin is a self-confidence pushed to its furthest point, and therefore a self-confidence which is weakness and not strength. To foresee every possible danger, to face every difficulty, to accept and act upon warnings, to wait attack ready armed, and then having done all,

to stand, believing that victory lies with him who has prepared himself for it, this is the confidence which is as a great power. But the idea that we, in our bare right of being English, are safeguarded in some mysterious way, so that it is enough for us to feel secure that no danger threatens us, or that if it gathers it will miraculously vanish, this is a spirit which spells disaster and humiliation, and one which we who love England, believing well in her high destiny, ought to combat at every turn. The Indian Mutiny found us utterly unprepared at all points, and heavy was the price we had to pay as the result of having cried peace, where there was no peace, and of having said "All's well," when danger lurked unseen but close at hand!

The news of the outbreak at Meerut, followed by the story of the Delhi massacres, was quickly reported to General Anson, then Commander-in-Chief in India, and he too felt convinced that the first step must be the retaking of Delhi. Only he felt the force at his disposal was too small to accomplish the task with the slightest prospect of success, and thought it would take two or three weeks before an advance could be made without a chance of failure.

John Lawrence, the strong statesman-like Commissioner of the Punjab, was at Rawal Pindi, where, with Chamberlain and Edwardes, he was entering into every detail of the situation, but he would not hear of delay, and wrote strongly to Anson, urging him to act with vigour and promptitude, and not

allow European soldiers to remain cooped up in their cantonments, calmly waiting the progress of events.

Anson did not alter his opinion as to the heavy odds against him, and time proved that Delhi was far harder to recapture than Lawrence imagined. But he determined to answer the appeal, taking the risk; and having worked night and day to get his force equipped, he started himself for Umballa, so as to be near the scene of action. At Meerut the garrison had been strengthened, and orders had been given that a brigade from there was to join General Anson at Kurnal, and the combined forces to march on Delhi. So far, Anson had done excellent work and had overcome overwhelming difficulties, but his was not to be the task of leading on the troops in the great struggle which awaited them. At Kurnal he fell ill of cholera and died in a few hours, the last words on his lips being a hope that England would do him justice.

General Barnard took up the command, and found himself with the tiny force of about two thousand five hundred foot soldiers, six hundred cavalry, twenty-two guns, and an old-fashioned siege train. But he pressed forward, and on June 7th joined hands with the Meerut force. All were thirsting for a fight, and they had not long to wait. Early next day they came within reach of the enemy's guns, and an artillery battle began. Our guns were not sufficiently heavy to make much impression, but a fine charge

of the 75th Regiment, who, with ringing cheers, rushed forward and fought round the guns at the point of the bayonet, backed up by a cavalry charge from another direction and the firing of the Horse Artillery, scattered the sepoys, who fled in a panic, leaving their guns and stores behind them. The capture of thirteen guns was in itself an enormous gain, but Barnard wisely decided to press forward and follow up this first victory by seizing on a good position outside Delhi, from whence the future attacks could be made.

The Ridge which overlooked the city, and was open in the rear to the road along which all our supplies and reinforcements must come, was obviously the position to be taken, and after some sharp fighting the sepoys who held it were driven back into the city, and from inside Delhi the mutineers could see once more the flag of England waving proudly from the heights. The first step had indeed been taken.

Meanwhile in the other direction Colonel Neville Chamberlain was steadily clearing the air, and Roberts, who saw all the confidential letters and telegrams, was learning "how the fate of Delhi and the lives of our countrymen and countrywomen in Upper India depended on the action taken by the authorities in the Punjab." He learned, too, how wise and foreseeing was John Lawrence, who knew as if by instinct those to be trusted and those to be suspected, and who let no sentimental opinions stand in his way. In Lahore, to which the movable

column had marched, the situation was highly critical, but had been admirably prepared for by Mr. Montgomery, the chief civil officer, who, "neglecting no precaution, admitted of no alarm, and inspired all with confidence and zeal." Late in May, Lawrence was able to telegraph to headquarters: "All safe as yet in the Punjab, but the aspect of affairs most threatening. The whole native regular army are ready to break out, and unless a blow be soon struck, the irregulars as a body will follow their example. Every European soldier will be required to save the country if the whole of the native troops turn against us. This is the opinion of all leading minds here. Every precaution which foresight can dictate is being taken to hold our own, independent of the natives."

It was the 3rd of June when the movable column had reached Lahore, just in time to overawe the sullen native troops there, who were on the point of mutiny, and a few days later Roberts had to watch a very painful, though a necessary deed. Two sepoys, who were found to have gone on parade with loaded guns, and had been heard stirring up their comrades to rebellion, were tried by court-martial, again composed of loyal native officers, and were sentenced to be publicly executed, "blown away from the guns." It was to Roberts "a terrible sight, one likely to haunt the beholder for many a long day." But to a native it was not the degrading death that hanging would have been.

Colonel Chamberlain made a stirring speech to all the native troops who were present. "God forbid," he said, "that I should have to take the life of another soldier, but, like you, I have sworn to be faithful and do my duty, and I will fulfil my vow by blowing away every man guilty of sedition and mutiny, as I have done to-day."

The natives, however, were not to be held back for long, even when such a punishment stared them in the face. From all the districts round came appeals for the movable column to march in their direction, either to disarm or to hold in check the sepoys. This first was highly dangerous work, but Chamberlain was cool and splendidly audacious. He was also highly popular with the native cavalry, and his trust in them was not betrayed. Still, seldom in all his later experiences can Roberts have been through so critical a time, when nerve, decision, and unerring judgment, had to fight and conquer treachery, mutiny, and greatly superior numbers.

Once at Umritsar, the column hoped and expected that the next move would be to Delhi, but it was not thought safe to move the force out of the Punjab for the present. This was of course a disappointment, which was doubled when the order came that Chamberlain himself should at once go forward to Delhi, as adjutant-general, and it was not for some days that the column knew that their new chief was to be no one less than John Nicolson. Under ordinary circumstances Chamberlain would have taken

his own staff officer on with him, but he thought it right at the present crisis to leave Roberts, who held so many of the strings in his hand, behind him, that he might act as before and become Nicolson's staff officer. Young Roberts heard of his decision with very mixed feelings. To go forward to Delhi was naturally what he wanted, and yet to serve directly under Nicolson was a real pleasure to him, and, moreover, a most valuable training. Between the time that Chamberlain left and Nicolson joined, it was on Roberts' shoulders that all the real responsibility connected with the command of the column lay, as the senior officer present had never even commanded a regiment; but the young staff officer had mastered all the details of his work too thoroughly to be disconcerted, while his simple unaffected manners, free from anything like conceit or over confidence, led officers, in point of age his superiors, to willingly give him all the help they could. To be in such a position when only twenty-five, was in itself a great opportunity for Roberts, and one of which he was altogether worthy.

Nicolson's first move was to Jellunder, where the officer in command had acted in so vacillating and nervous a spirit that the natives had become insolent and contemptuous, and trouble was imminent. On two points Nicolson quickly showed himself to be the born soldier, full of resources, able to conceive and carry out his plans to meet the present situation. "He seemed always to know," said Roberts, "what

to do, and the best way to do it." And the unlimited confidence put in him by his troops was an additional strength to the force.

His first move was to organise a really reliable Intelligence Department, so that he could be sure of hearing quickly and correctly everything that was going on in the district round about. Nothing could be more important, for to know the moves and designs of the enemy is in itself half a victory, or, at any rate, the best safeguard against defeat; and Nicolson, with his wonderful knowledge of native character, was not the man to be easily deceived or misled. His eye was not to be mistaken. Once at this time he passed two old bent men carrying harmless-looking bundles on their backs. In a moment he had them stopped and searched, and rightly enough they turned out to be sepoys carrying swords to a cavalry regiment which had just been disarmed.

His other most successful plan lay in realising that a small force which could move very quickly was worth much more than a large force which went slowly; and so he further split up his column and formed what might be called a flying emergency column, which could be ready at the shortest possible notice, and in which the foot-soldiers were sent in light carts instead of marching, so that they could keep pace with the cavalry and horse artillery.

So far a certain number of native troops had been with the column, and had outwardly shown no signs

of mutiny, probably because they meant keeping quiet till they reached Delhi, and then joining their comrades. But Nicolson thought it safer to be rid of them, and decided to disarm them. This again was to be done suddenly and unexpectedly, even their own British officers not being warned beforehand. A parade was ordered of all the troops, the guns were ready for action, and the gunners had their orders in case of resistance. But once again the men were too thunderstruck to do other than obey. Roberts had to carry the order to the two commanding officers. One, Colonel Sandeman, burst into tears.

"What?" he said, "disarm my regiment? I will answer with my life for the loyalty of every man."

And Roberts had to regretfully repeat the order before the old man could believe the disgrace which had fallen on the regiment he had been so honourably connected with for over thirty years.

The other officer, Major Younghusband, though equally distressed, knew only too well that the distrust was justified, and his reply to Roberts was a low "Thank God!"

Another check came to the column, when their feet as well as their hearts were set in the direction of Delhi, for they had to go back to Umritsar and disarm other natives on the way. However, a pressing telegram came from Delhi, begging for every artillery officer who could be spared. Nicolson had

no wish to part with his staff officer, and again Roberts stood face to face with conflicting wishes and duties. But he felt, as did Nicolson, that his duty called him to his regiment, then on the Delhi Ridge, and at dawn next morning he set out.

On reaching Loodhiana, he found that the only means of reaching Delhi was by the mail carts, in which every seat had been booked for many days to come, and he was good-naturedly laughed at when he insisted that he must start that night. At first he went to the postmaster, who could only repeat the same depressing fact, but nothing daunted, Roberts tackled the deputy commissioner himself, determined to leave no chance untried. As generally happens to people if only they are determined enough, a way round the difficulty appeared. Certainly there was no room on a mail cart, but a small ammunition cart was to be sent up that night, and in this the deputy commissioner said he could find a corner for Roberts, so long as he promised to take only the smallest amount of kit.

Roberts went triumphantly back to the officers who had laughed at his determination, which they had assured him would be all in vain, and showed them that he laughs longest who laughs last. But he managed to squeeze two of them into the ammunition cart, and they set out carrying their kit bags in their laps.

On they went, passing places where the dead bodies of native soldiers acted as milestones, nearer

and nearer grew the sound of guns, and in the darkness they reached our piquet lines safely, after a drive full of danger.

But what cared Roberts of that? He had obtained his heart's desire; he lay before Delhi.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE DELHI RIDGE

THE Ridge was by far the best position around Delhi that our troops could have taken up, "a coign of vantage for attack and a rampart of defence." It stood out sixty feet above the city, and below lay the mosques and minarets of Delhi with their rich red walls, the picturesque houses with their groves and gardens, while another dash of bright colour was formed by the river Jumna, whose waters glittered and glimmered under the Eastern sun. And yet inside those walls were countless hosts of a merciless enemy, maniacs in their hatred of the English, thirsting for life-blood, dreaming of torture, of murder, of destruction.

On the Ridge lay less than six thousand men, with guns which could not be relied on to fire accurately for as many hundred yards, and every day death thinned the ranks, for disease and cholera worked their worst, while every sortie made, or every attack repulsed, was victory dearly bought. So small a force, however well placed, could not cover the city walls, while our guns could only command a few of the gates, and were too far away from the river bridges to interfere with the supplies and reinforce-

ments which poured in, as one fresh rebel force after another reached Delhi.

The whole thing has been graphically described as "a struggle between a handful of men on an open ridge, and a host behind massive, well-fortified walls," —a struggle, it may be added, in which every individual soldier had need to be a hero, a fighter endowed with the strength of ten.

Already there were men in this gallant force whose names had become glorious, and Roberts was proud to feel that from henceforth he was to be associated with them, both in the struggle which lay before them and in the victory which, under God, they meant to make their own. He found there many friends, from Chamberlain himself, now a General and anxious to hear the latest news of the movable column, and Henry Norman, an old staff officer of Sir Abraham Roberts, now holding an important staff appointment at headquarters, to Jimmy Hills, his special ally since their days together at Addiscombe.

Almost as a matter of course Roberts was marked out for a staff appointment, and on the morning after his arrival was made Deputy-Assistant-Quarter-master-General to the Artillery.

Within the British lines there existed a strong feeling in favour of an attack upon the city, as a very hazardous chance indeed, and yet the only chance.

"The place is so strong and my means so inade-

quate," wrote General Barnard, "that I have nothing left but to place all on the hazard of a die and attempt a *coup de main*, which I purpose to do. If successful all will be well, but reverse will be fatal, as I have no reserve on which to retire. Assuredly, you all greatly underestimated the difficulties of Delhi. I see really nothing for it but a determined rush; and this, please God, you shall hear of as successful."

Plans for the assault were worked out by three engineer officers under the direction of the General, but with such strict secrecy that officers who ought to have known were kept entirely in the dark, and subalterns were the advisers chosen to "suggest means of carrying out so vitally important an enterprise as this, on which the safety of the Empire depends."

The scheme was that in the early dawn the troops were to creep under cover to within a few hundred yards of two gates not as yet bricked up, blow in the gates by powder bags and unite forces inside, and in accordance with this a sudden parade was ordered at one o'clock on the morning of June 13th, at which the staff and the various commanding officers first knew what had been arranged. But by some accident or misunderstanding the 75th Regiment had not been brought up, and by the time it had been fetched in from its outlying position it was too late to make a move.

The disappointment was a bitter one, but in the

light of later experience Roberts speaks of this cause, which led to the relinquishment of the plan, as "a most merciful dispensation of Providence, which saved us from what would certainly have been an irreparable disaster." Norman declared "that the accident was one of those happy interpositions in our behalf of which we had such numbers to be thankful for"; and General Barnard himself wrote "that success would have been as fatal as failure, for even had they got inside Delhi they could not have held it, and that though moral courage would be required to face the cry sure to be raised against the inactivity of the force, he was convinced the only policy lay in waiting till reinforcements could be got up."

But it must ever be remembered that Barnard, brave and devoted officer as he was, was no Indian soldier, and knew nothing of native troops. He had been suddenly put into a position of the utmost difficulty when he had only arrived in India a few weeks, and had been ordered to carry out a task begun by another man, who would have been the first to realise that it could not be carried out with that inferior force. Add to this that he was by nature anxious and nervous, unable to sleep or eat properly under the strain, wanting in any confidence in himself, and not possessing the gift of being able to pick out the really capable men among his subordinates, and it is not difficult to see that the Delhi field force suffered severely from

not having a strong man at their head who could give them confidence, and keep up their spirits through days of harassing attacks, suspense, and danger.

Neville Chamberlain's arrival was eagerly looked for.

"When he comes things will begin to go right," was the general feeling.

Another ray of hope came with the arrival of the "Guides Corps"—three troops of cavalry and six companies of infantry, the first of the Punjab reinforcements sent by Sir John Lawrence, splendid native troops, who had marched six hundred miles in twenty-two days, and yet who came into camp fit and well, ready to fight after a few hours' rest. Their brilliant young commander, Lieutenant Battye, was killed on the very afternoon of their arrival, right up against the city walls to which they had driven back the enemy.

"Now I have a chance of seeing service," he had said joyfully just before, and proudly, too, he whispered with his dying breath the old Roman saying, that it was a sweet and worthy thing for a man to die for his country.

On June 17th it was seen that the enemy were erecting a battery from which they could pour an artillery fire which would rake the whole of our position; and to prevent this an attack was ordered, which was entirely successful, thanks to the leadership of Major Tombs, who had two horses shot

under him, and to the Goorkhas, native troops from the hills—little hardy men, fine soldiers, and devoted allies of the British, who never had occasion to appreciate their help more than during these weary days before Delhi.

For weary days they were! One attack followed another; every part of our position was assailed, and though with stubborn, dogged courage those hosts of the enemy which streamed out were invariably beaten back, yet each attack cost lives which could ill be spared, and wore out our troops, who were already exhausted and worked to their uttermost limit.

"Many more of these attacks," wrote one who was through the whole siege, "would have turned our position into a graveyard, on which the enemy might quickly have encamped."

Cholera, too, daily increased, and carried off among its victims General Barnard. "Give me something tough to do," he had asked Lord Canning on his arrival in India, "I will serve you faithfully." How tough the job had been only those who were with him knew. They also were witnesses of how truly he had been faithful, sparing himself nothing, working night and day, till he fell at his post "happy."

General Reed was next in command, and his first move was to blow up a number of bridges and to strengthen, as far as was possible, the position at our rear, so that the way might be kept clear for the reinforcements being sent by Lawrence, who were

steadily pouring in, and who brought with them new life and vigour. He also got rid of the Hindustani soldiers still remaining in camp, who, although professedly loyal, had undoubtedly been acting as spies and traitors, and once had even brought some of the enemy's cavalry through the piquets and right into the British lines. On this last occasion the hero of the hour was Jimmy Hills, who had never ceased to be the most intimate friend of Roberts, associated closely with him through the ever-varying life which lay before him, his most staunch and devoted admirer, whose affection led him at the age of nearly seventy out to South Africa in the wake of his comrade.

The facts were these.

On the 9th of July, Hills, in command of two guns, with some cavalry, was on the General's Mound, while close by was a party of native soldiers, who were watching the Trunk Road, and who suddenly gave the alarm that the enemy were in sight, the truth being that no warning had been given till the enemy were on the guns, and charging the thirty Carabineers, all unprepared for this sudden attack. Before the guns could be unlimbered they too were surrounded. Hills had sent to headquarters and to Tombs, his commanding officer; after this his first object was to give the guns time to load.

So, to quote his own words, "I charged at the front rank myself, cut down the first fellow, slashed the next across the face as hard as I could, when two sowars charged me. Both their horses crashed into

mine at the same moment, and of course both horse and myself were sent flying. We went down at such a pace that I escaped the cuts made at me, one of them giving my jacket an awful slice just below the left arm. Well, I lay quite snug till all had passed over me, and then got up and looked about for my sword. I found it full ten yards off. I had hardly got hold of it when three fellows returned, two on horseback. The first I wounded and dropped him from his horse. The second charged me with a lance; I put it aside, caught him a gash and thought I had killed him. Apparently he must have clung to his horse, for he disappeared. Then came up the wounded man, but got his head split, and then came the third one, a young active fellow. I was weak from want of breath, the fall from my horse having pumped me, but I went at the fellow and cut him on the shoulder. Some cloth, however, turned the blow. He managed to seize the hilt of my sword and twisted it out of my hand, and then we had a hand to hand fight, I punching his head with my fist and he trying to cut me, but I was too close to him. Somehow or other I fell, and then luckily for me Tombs came up and shot the fellow. I was so choked by my cloak, which had got fixed round my throat, that move I could not till I got it loosened. When I did get up Tombs was so eager to get up to a mound near us that I picked up my sword and followed him, and a little later on I saw the very man Tombs had saved me from, moving off with my

pistol; he had only been wounded, and shammed dead. I told Tombs, and we went at him. I rushed in at him and thrust, but he cleverly jumped aside, cut me on the head and knocked me down. I fancy I am again indebted to Tombs for my life, for although I might have got up again and fought, I was bleeding like a pig, and of course would have had a bad chance. My wound was a beautiful one, four inches long, and two veins were cut through."

Both Hills and Tombs won the Victoria Cross on that day.

All this while the rebel cavalry had dashed on and had made for the native artillery.

"Get your guns," they cried, "and come with us to Delhi."

But the gunners stood firm. "Who are you to give us orders?" they asked. "We only obey our own officers."

Roberts was at the other end of the camp when all this happened, watching the arrival of his horses and servants with the other belongings which he had left behind him when he had started so hurriedly for Delhi, and for the moment it looked as if they would all be lost in this wild charge. But the unexpected loyalty of the native gunners disconcerted the sowars, and they thought it best to make good their escape. So Roberts received his property in safety, thanks to having been then and ever since very faithfully served by his Indian attendants, who have shown in many

ways their personal devotion to one always kind and considerate to them. But the treachery of the native cavalry cost us heavily, and the casualties for that day were 50 killed and 170 wounded.

A few days later Roberts had a taste of very close fighting, for he was sent as staff officer to Brigadier Showers in a sortie up to a wall from which a heavy artillery fire was being poured. Chamberlain jumped his horse over the wall, and the men followed, driving the enemy back inch by inch, who though having all the advantage of the walled gardens, were pursued right up to the Lahore Gate. Nothing more could be done at the moment by our troops, as the fire from the walls was terrific; even making their way back to camp was dangerous enough, for they were hardly pressed from the rear all the way. The gunners especially were sufferers, as many of them were wounded, and the horses became restive. Roberts, equally at home with guns or horses, went to their assistance till he was struck in the back by a bullet, and only managed with the greatest difficulty to sit his horse till he got back to camp. Here they found that he had been hit near the spine, and would have been killed if it had not been for a leather case with pistol caps which he always wore in front, but which had slipped round to the back and so had broken the force of the bullet that passed through it.

On this day again there was a heavy casualty list, 15 killed and nearly 200 wounded. Roberts

was laid up for nearly a month, his wound keeping him more or less of a prisoner in camp. Nevertheless he refused to be idle at a time when every man was needed. It was characteristic of him that he thought no work beneath him, and devoted himself to the very disagreeable task of superintending the burial or burning of the many dead camels and bullocks, whose decaying bodies were most harmful to the health of all on the Ridge.

"Just like Roberts," wrote an officer; "determined to get to the bottom of everything, and ready to do whatever turned up."

General Reed was next to break down in health, and then came the question as to who should take over the command. Chamberlain's was naturally the first name to be suggested, but he too had been wounded at the same time as Roberts, and was not yet fit for any work. Wilson therefore was chosen—a sound if an over-cautious general. He was a master of detail, and a great organiser, so that he at once made changes, and introduced methods in the daily routine, which lightened the work, and gave the worn-out men more chance of rest, though at the same time he insisted on better discipline, and stricter attention to many little points into which something like slackness had crept.

For nearly six weeks the Delhi Field Force had been holding its own on the Ridge, attacked almost daily, outnumbered overwhelmingly, having had to give up more than once the plan of assault, and to

rest contented with little victories, which practically made no impression on the enemy. There were not wanting some who declared that the position was hopeless, that the troops could do far more important work elsewhere, and eventually regain Delhi as the crowning point. But these were greatly in the minority. As a whole the force was disappointed, but still dogged and determined; and Colonel Baird-Smith of the Engineers represented the feeling which prevailed through the camp, when being asked by the General for a frank opinion, replied, "It is our duty, sir, to retain the grip which we now have upon Delhi, and to hold on like grim death till the place is our own."

He pointed out what General Wilson, as an artillery officer, knew all too well, that, given some far-reaching guns which could silence the guns on the Delhi walls, the situation would be greatly changed; that reinforcements could not be much longer delayed, for Lawrence would never fail them, and that the arrival of a siege train would mean almost certain success. Their object, therefore, was to strengthen their own position; act on the defensive; abandon the dashing though costly practice of following the retreating sepoys up to their walls; die at their posts if the enemy by strength of numbers should break through the entrenchments and overpower them, but never to dream of surrender, and to wait on—holding their ground—till Nicolson arrived with men and guns. This heroic spirit was in itself a great force making

for success, and though all through the early days of August the enemy ceased not to harass and attack, there daily grew a feeling of hopefulness and confidence.

On the 7th of August John Nicolson arrived, the forerunner of his column which would follow him in a few days, and also of the greatly needed siege train. The very presence of such a man infected the Delhi force with new life, arriving as he did a few hours after a gallant capture of the enemy's guns had been made by Showers, and bringing with him some horse artillery, cavalry, and that wonderful corps of Guides, who added every day to their laurels. With Wilson, Nicolson passed through the camp from piquet to piquet, taking in at a glance every difficulty, every weakness in our position, estimating exactly wherein lay success or failure. His manner was rough, almost overbearing, but men forgave that when they realised the task he had accomplished in coming to their rescue. "His manner wears off, and the more you see of him the more you will like him," said Baird-Smith, and both officers and men proved the truth of the words. Roberts was delighted to see his old chief, and Nicolson had many a story to tell him of the stirring days through which the column had passed since he had left it.

From outside the news was bad. Henry Lawrence had died, Lucknow had not been relieved, and reinforcements from Havelock could not be hoped for. But with Nicolson and his column at their back,

the Delhi force had no fear. The enemy, who always got all the news, heard that the siege train was on the way, and knowing the importance of intercepting it, set out with great numbers for this purpose. Nicolson went after them, and had asked for Roberts as his staff officer, but the doctors would not allow him to go, as his wound was far from being cured. It was a great disappointment, but one of the fortunes, or rather misfortunes of war, of which Roberts has had his full share.

Nicolson's expedition was entirely successful, "thanks to his own energy, judgment, and determination, and also to the steadiness and gallantry in action, and the cheerfulness under great privation and fatigue exhibited by the officers and men placed under his command," wrote General Wilson. So no further attempt was made to intercept the siege train, and early in September it arrived, "over miles of flooded road, through a country teeming with a disaffected population, exposed at almost any point to an attack by rebels; slowly it came, dragging its ponderous weight along, bringing with it an ample supply of ammunition."

At once the question of assaulting the city came to the fore, and now it was Wilson who held back. The strain and responsibility of the last few weeks had told on him, strong man as he was; his nerve had given way; he knew that the last of the reinforcements had arrived, and that he had no more than 10,000 men available, and hesitating, he grew

daily more hopeless as to the possibility of taking and holding Delhi with those numbers.

Nicolson knew that a blow must be struck at once or irretrievable failure would result. To Roberts, young as he was, he confided his plans, which were thoroughly characteristic of a man who invariably went for the one main object, and cleared any obstacle to it out of the way, regardless of consequences.

"Delhi must be taken, and at once," he said, "and if Wilson hesitates longer I intend to propose at to-day's meeting that he should be superseded."

Then on Roberts pointing out that Nicolson himself would thus become senior officer, he added, "Under the circumstances I could not possibly accept the command myself. I shall propose that it be given to Campbell of the 52nd, and I am prepared to serve under him for the time being, so that no one can accuse me of being influenced by personal motives."

It was an extreme step, and one which fortunately had not to be taken, as Wilson at the meeting consented to the assault. Roberts was not present at the council, but waited anxiously outside to hear a result on which so much depended. The decision gave him "intense relief," but it is interesting to know that both at the time and since, he felt that Nicolson would have been right in acting as he proposed, under circumstances so unusual.

On September 7th, Wilson issued a stirring order,

commanding the assault, and calling on the troops who had borne so much in the past, to perform still harder work in the same cheerful spirit for a short period only, after which he believed they would be rewarded by the capture of the city. He felt assured, he told them, that with British pluck and determination they would carry all before them, showing no quarter to the mutineers, but at the same time, for the sake of humanity, and the honour of their country, sparing all the women and children.

On the 14th of September the whole force was paraded at three in the morning, and divided into four assaulting columns and a reserve, the first to storm the breach at the Cashmere Bastion; the second, that in the Water Bastion; the third, to blow open the Cashmere Gate; the fourth, to force an entrance through the Lahore Gate, and the reserve to follow up, giving support wherever necessary.

The Engineers had worked nobly at the preparations. The gunners, too, were all ready for the fray.

"I must shake hands with you fellows," said Nicolson to the latter, among whom was Roberts; "you have done your best to make my work easy."

General Barton, then a captain, wrote a vivid account of that morning parade in his diary.

"A little after midnight we fell in as quietly as possible, and by the light of a lantern the orders of assault were read to the men. They were to the following purport. Any officer or man who might be wounded was to be left where he fell; no one was

to step from the ranks; there were no men to spare. If the assault was successful he would be carried away to wherever he could best receive medical assistance. If we failed, wounded and sound must be prepared to bear the worst. There was to be no plundering; no prisoners were to be made, as we had no one to guard them, and care was to be taken that no women or children were injured. To this the men answered at once by, 'No fear, sir.' The officers now pledged their honours on their swords to abide by these orders, and the men then promised to follow their example. Just as the regiment was about to move off, Father Bertrand (the Roman Catholic chaplain) came up in his vestments and begged for permission to bless the regiments, saying, 'We may differ in some matters of religion, but the blessing of an old man and a clergyman can do nothing but good.' Permission was at once given, and Father Bertrand blessed the troops in the most impressive manner, offering up a prayer for our success and for mercy on the souls of those so soon to die. The different columns then moved out of camp, were told off to their respective destinations, and then, when the signal for a start was given, the Royal Rifles led off with a ringing British cheer, and the guns on the siege train opened fire."

The news of the ghastly massacre at Cawnpore had reached our troops the day before, and never did men set out more resolute in their purpose, "only a handful of men indeed compared to the thousands

inside the city, but terrible in their strength, their discipline, and the passions awakened in their hearts."

Leading them was John Nicolson; "a tower of strength, a guiding star," he seemed to be in the eyes of young Roberts, who watched the inscrutable face of this man on whom hung such great issues, wondering if he could read therein any of the thoughts of that master-mind.

As the front ranks of British troops came in sight of the rebels, a hail of bullets poured forth from the walls, but undaunted our men pushed on, and throwing the ladders into the ditch they mounted them, in calm defiance of the black figures above them who hurled stones at them and breathed out fire and slaughter. Nicolson himself, at the head of his column, was the first to ascend, and followed by his men climbed over the breaches in front, "unhurt and unheeding, as if death itself could not stand against him." With cheer after cheer they drove the rebels back and back, till at last the ramparts were ours. Two of the other columns also carried their positions finely, and joined Nicolson near the Cashmere Gate.

The fourth column, however, had been checked and driven back with very heavy loss, due mainly to the fact that the force was composed of details from many different regiments, so that it lacked combination, and further, that their commanding officer, Major Reid, was severely wounded early in the day.

Great confusion followed. This partial success

had elated the enemy, and with fresh vigour they began a hand to hand attack on the three columns who were forcing their way through the streets. Our men were worn out with the gigantic efforts they had made in taking the ramparts, and storming what one of them described as the "gates of Hell itself." They were unfit for another desperate struggle, and there were no reserves who could be called up.

All this time Roberts had been watching the fight, for as staff officer to General Wilson he could take no actual part in it. As the day wore on rumours of checks and disasters were brought in, Wilson was nervous and tired out, the news became more and more alarming; and when he heard that Nicolson was severely wounded, added to what proved happily to be untrue reports about the fall of other senior officers, he lost heart altogether and talked of withdrawing the troops from their hardly won positions, of leaving the city and falling back on the Ridge. He sent Roberts to ride to different quarters of the field with other staff officers to bring back an accurate report of what had happened to the Fourth Column.

The first sight which met his eye was a painful one, for seeing a doolie without bearers by the wayside, and realising that it must contain some seriously wounded soldier who had been left there, he got off his horse to see what help he could give, only to find a dying man inside, and that man his hero and friend John Nicolson. "I am dying," he said quietly; "there is

no chance for me." With great difficulty Roberts found four men, put them in charge of a sergeant, and ordered them to carry Nicolson to the field hospital. It was all he could do, for he dare not stay longer, great as was his distress at having to leave his friend alone in the presence of the last great enemy, death. Nor did he ever see him alive again.

"It was almost more than I could bear," he says; "other men had daily died around me, friends and comrades had been killed beside me, but I never felt as I felt then—to lose Nicolson seemed to me at that moment to lose everything."

The fact of Nicolson being mortally wounded was in itself a staggering blow to the Delhi force, otherwise Roberts had not an altogether bad report to carry back to his General. Tombs and Hope Grant were alive and unhurt, the cavalry had been relieved, and Reid's column was no longer in a critical position. Still Wilson wavered and spoke of withdrawal, although every one of his staff officers vehemently opposed such a suggestion. To draw back now, when so much had been won at such a price! It was impossible!

"We *must* hold on," declared Baird-Smith, who though wounded and in great pain refused to go to hospital. Neville Chamberlain said the same thing, and when some one told Nicolson what was in the General's mind, his eyes flashed fire, and he answered: "Thank God, I have strength yet to shoot

him if necessary." Wilson saw that those officers on whose opinion he could rely were unanimous in their determination to hold out, and so he no longer spoke of retreat.

Roberts, with two other staff officers, made an adventurous round later on in the afternoon, visiting every position occupied by our troops, and endeavouring to put an end to the universal confusion which seemed to prevail, owing to officers and men getting hopelessly separated as they fought their way along through the narrow streets and lanes. Roberts had his horse shot under him, and more than once he narrowly escaped with his life. At last came the sunset, and with it silence for awhile. Both besiegers and besieged seemed worn out with the day's fighting and anxious for rest, so that a new struggle might begin on the morrow. Something indeed had been achieved, but the price paid for it by our force had been nothing less than 66 officers and 1104 men killed and wounded. With morning came restored order and discipline among the troops, and a rather different method of warfare. The hand to hand fighting in the streets was stopped, the men were kept more under cover, and the chief work lay in the hands of the Engineers, who undermined and sapped from house to house; points already held were fortified, breastworks were formed, and our whole position was strengthened, while General Wilson wisely ordered every bottle of wine or spirits to be destroyed, so that temptation

to drink might be put out of the way of the tired-out troops.

Chamberlain, too, took command of the force inside the city. Roberts was attached to the Engineers, and worked through the courtyards and lanes with Lieutenant Taylor, the life and soul of all the siege operations, "gallant and eminently talented," as he was described in the despatches. Full of danger indeed was their work, but neither of them gave a thought to danger, though their own good sense and resource saved them more than once.

By dint of a little bluff and still more presence of mind, Roberts with another officer got taken by some terrified money-lenders to a room from which they could take in exactly the position of the Lahore Gate, and so make their plans for capturing it, plans which were successfully carried out a few hours later. So day by day our troops fought on, ever with more and more success, and as each new position was gained, light guns were brought forward which helped to clear the streets. Roberts begged so hard to be in the last great struggle which was to centre round the Lahore Gate, that he served with the 60th Rifles on that eventful 20th of September, which ended in our victory being complete.

At sunrise on the next morning a royal salute was fired, and a flag was floated over Delhi, which told that after a week of hourly fighting, the great city had fallen to "British pluck and endurance."

Nicolson just lived to hear his life had not been

given in vain, and he asked for nothing more. To the last his thought was for his country; he would not even let his friend Chamberlain stay long at his side. "Your duty is at headquarters," he said; "I am glad to think you are there."

He talked much of Edwardes and his wife. "Tell them," he begged, "that I was ever better for a residence, however short, with them both." And their farewell message to him—"Our love in time and eternity," brought a bright smile to his brave, calm face.

He was buried opposite the Cashmere Gate, the breach of which he had been the first to crown, his body being borne on a gun carriage. But there was no band to play, nor were any volleys fired. Not a man beyond a few special friends could be spared, and so, without pomp or show, the hero of the hour was laid to rest. The sobs of his Pathan orderlies broke through the stillness, and the wail of his special horsemen rent the air. He had been their god, and now he was no more. Without him life itself was dark, and their only wish was to follow him, sure that in other worlds he would still be a leader of men. One or two headmen of the tribe committed suicide, but the second in command gave wiser counsel.

"He always told us he was a man like as we are, and worshipped a God we could not see though He was ever near us. Let us learn to worship his God!"

And at the first opportunity the whole tribe sought out a missionary, told him their story, and asked that they might be baptized.

So Nicolson still led them on.

The news of the victory flashed through India and over the seas to England, where the glory which belonged to that brave army was quickly recognised. After weeks of weary waiting, ten thousand men had attacked a city defended at every point. Three thousand of these men had fallen, killed or wounded, but the city had been taken, and "in the name of outraged humanity, in memory of innocent blood ruthlessly shed, and in acknowledgment of the first signal vengeance inflicted on signal treason," the Governor-General recorded his gratitude to the brave soldiers of the Delhi force, who had waited so patiently and fought so heroically.

CHAPTER V

THE RELIEF OF LUCKNOW

DELHI had fallen, and the first telling blow had been dealt against the sepoy power, but the end of the struggle was not yet. Much, very much remained to be faced, and even for the worn-out Delhi Field Force there was to be no rest. For within the walls of Lucknow a gallant little garrison stood at bay, holding their own against the hosts of the enemy.

"Soldiers all day and sentinels all through the night,
Ever the mine and assault, our sallies, their lying alarms.
Bugles and drums in the darkness, and shoutings and soundings to arms,
Ever the labour of fifty that had to be done by five,
Ever the marvel among us that one should be left alive,
Ever the day with its traitorous death from the loopholes around,
Ever the night with its coffinless corpse to be laid in the ground.
Thoughts of the breezes of May blowing over an English field,
Cholera, scurvy, and fever, the wound that *would* not be healed.
Grief for our perishing children, and never a moment for grief.
Toil and ineffable weariness, faltering hopes of relief,
Havelock baffled, or beaten, or butchered for all we knew—

Then day and night, day and night, coming down on the still shattered walls
Millions of musket bullets, and thousands of cannon-balls—
But ever upon the topmost roof, our Banner of England flew."

And the first thought of the Delhi force was to go with all possible speed and join Havelock in his splendid though so far unsuccessful efforts to relieve Lucknow. On September 24th a column set out for Cawnpore under the command of Colonel Greathed, with which Roberts went also as Deputy-Assistant-Quartermaster-General.

"Never," says one of the number, "did boys escape from the clutches of a schoolmaster with greater glee than we experienced that morning."

Delhi, with its ghastly sights and memories, its streets strewn with the dead, its courts and palaces reeking with associations of fiendish cruelty, was left behind, and the column moved out into fresh pure air, to breathe in life and not death, to feel, for the moment at least, free under the radiant sky.

The position of affairs was this.

Sir Henry Lawrence, the Commissioner of the whole province of Oude, of which Lucknow was the capital, had never rested calmly on any false feeling of security. In private and in public he had never feared to tell of the dangers which lay so close at hand, though other men refused to recognise them. That we should have "to strike anew for our Indian Empire" was a thought which grew steadily in his mind, a possibility which became a probability, though

to other men it remained a phantom. He warned, but his warnings were lightly set aside; he saw, but there were none in high places who would believe in his vision. With the outbreak at Meerut he knew that his worst fears were realised, and at once he turned to the task of protecting that which had been entrusted to him. He received no orders, so acting on his own responsibility he fixed on Lucknow as the most suitable place in which to concentrate the British troops and the British families, and that part of Lucknow called "The Residency" was the part he chose as being the best to defend and hold permanently. The question was whether the position could be fortified in time, and Lawrence was not the man to underestimate difficulties. But he had resolved to nail the colours to the mast, and with calm forethought, and resolute will, he set to work. Every hand was employed: ditches were excavated, parapets, stakes, and palisades were erected; slopes were scarped, ramparts built, widened, and pierced for batteries; roofs of houses protected by high-built walls; windows and doors were barricaded and walls loopholed; great stores of food and grain were also collected.

"Time is everything just now," runs a memorandum written by Lawrence in his private notebook; "time, firmness, promptness, conciliation, and prudence. Each individual may at this crisis prove most useful or dangerous; there must be no bustle, no appearance of alarm, still less of panic; but at the

same time there must be the utmost watchfulness."

By the end of May the sepoys were in universal revolt, but Lucknow was ready to face a fierce fight. In June came the news of the surrender of Cawnpore, where the garrison, ill-prepared for attack, had held out for eighteen days, and then, for the sake of the women and children, had trusted in the fair-sounding promises of Nana Sahib, and had evacuated the position, only to find themselves betrayed and forsaken.

And then the brunt of the battle was directed against Lucknow. One assault after another was made, always to be beaten back by the resolute but fast diminishing band.

"The wonder was," wrote one of the number, "not that there were so many casualties as there were, but that any person was left alive in the garrison."

Lawrence knew it must be many a long day before relief could come to him, and he knew also that surrender meant certain massacre to all within the walls, so "to hold on" was his fixed determination.

But though his hand had sown the seed, another was to reap the harvest, for early in July he was fatally wounded by a shell. To the last he was thinking of Lucknow and its safety, talking over every point of importance in its defence with those he had chosen to succeed him, drawing up rules and suggestions, laying on them as a dying trust his own policy of "no surrender." Then, with the request

that on his tomb might be placed the words, "Here lies Henry Lawrence, who tried to do his duty," he gave

> "His body to the country's earth,
> And his pure soul unto his Captain Christ,
> Under whose colours he had fought so long."

And Lucknow, thanks to his wonderful preparations, still held out. The relieving army had started under Havelock, his orders being to "lose not a moment in supporting Sir Henry Lawrence at Lucknow and Sir Hugh Wheeler at Cawnpore," but almost as soon as he had forced his way up to Allahabad he got tidings of the disaster at the latter place. Havelock was now over sixty, but though white-haired and battered, there was nothing of weakness in him, mind or body. Like some old Puritan warrior, he feared nothing but God, and before Him he was as a little child.

"Give me wisdom," he prayed, "to fulfil the expectations of the Government and to restore tranquillity in the disturbed districts."

"Soldiers," he said to his men on the 7th of July, the day on which the advance on Lucknow was to be made; "soldiers, there is work before us! Some of you I know; others are yet strangers to me; but we have a common aspiration which knits us together as one man. I know you will give me no cause to waver in the implicit confidence I have in you." Then under drenching rain, to be followed by the heat of an Indian summer sun, the army set out on

a task which it was to take them twelve weeks to accomplish. There were still the women and children to be saved in Cawnpore, for to these Nana Sahib had promised safety; and, fiend as he was, no one believed him capable of injuring them.

"Think of our women and children in the power of those devils incarnate," said Havelock to his men. "With God's help we will save them, or every man of us die in the attempt. I am trying you sorely, but I know the stuff you are made of."

Their answer came in ringing cheers.

But when at last Cawnpore had been fought for and won, it was only to find that, savage and foiled, Nana Sahib had done his last and worst, and had massacred the women and children in cold blood within the walls, while British troops were close at hand, fighting hard for their deliverance.

"Was it any wonder," writes one, himself an old campaigner, "that when men carried back with them to camp a long heavy tress of golden hair, cut clean through as if by the slash of a sharp sword, and showed this token to comrades who had been fighting and marching and striving and straining that this thing might not be—was it any wonder that our soldiers swore to exact a merciless retribution as they stood around the dead but eloquent witness to this oath?"

Yet what a task lay before them! Death and disease had brought down their numbers to fifteen hundred, and they had still to fight their way

through fifty miles of enemy's country, in which one position after another was strongly held, and at last to rescue a garrison of barely a thousand strong which was surrounded by thousands of assailants, armed with British guns, served with the gunners British officers had trained. The men were confident, and Havelock never flinched. Yet he, at least, had counted the cost. "The chances of relieving Lucknow are daily multiplying against us," he wrote; "the difficulties of an advance are excessive. Communications and information convince me of the extreme delicacy and difficulty of the operation. But it shall be attempted at every risk." One-third of the way was accomplished at a heavy loss, and then Havelock saw that without reinforcements a further advance was a useless sacrifice of strength and life. His ammunition would be spent before he reached the gates of Lucknow, and his fighting force would be little more than six hundred. To fall back on Cawnpore, there to wait for men and ammunition, was the course he reluctantly decided to take. To order the men to turn their faces from Lucknow was as hateful to him as it was to those who had to obey the command. Early in August Sir James Outram was appointed to the command of the Dinapore and Cawnpore divisions, which necessarily gave him the precedence over Havelock, who was commanding a brigade in that division, and he arrived at Cawnpore in September. His first act was the one which has stamped him for ever as the most chivalrous of

soldiers, 'doing nought through vainglory, but ever esteeming others better than himself, valiant, self-denying, magnanimous, in all the true knight," as runs the inscription on his memorial statue in Calcutta.

For now that with reinforcements, a final, and what promised to be a successful advance on Lucknow was to be made, Outram declared that the honour of leading that advance must rest with him who had borne the heat and burden of the day.

In an army order, therefore, he published the announcement that "the Major-General, in gratitude for and admiration of the brilliant deeds of arms achieved by Brigadier-General Havelock and his gallant troops, will cheerfully waive his rank in favour of that officer on this occasion, and will accompany the force to Lucknow, tendering his military services to Brigadier-General Havelock as a volunteer." An act well worthy of him who was called the Bayard of the East; though an act which was no isolated impulse, but a piece which fitted into a character altogether great and generous.

It was to join hands with this force, now numbering upwards of three thousand, that the column from Delhi, which included Roberts as one of its staff officers, set out on that September morning. Their first battle was at Bolandshahr, where a number of the rebels who had escaped from Delhi were gathered together, and where there was some sharp fighting, altogether successful to the British.

Leading Hodson's Horse, a dashing regiment of irregular cavalry, was Lieutenant Hugh Gough, who had already won his spurs, and who to-day is proud to rank himself among the oldest and most intimate friends of Lord Roberts. "It was during this fight that I saw him first," he says. "Riding about with orders, and in the very thick of where danger was rifest, was a slight, striking-looking, keen, young officer, mounted on a Waziri horse (a favourite horse of John Nicolson's, by the way), who attracted my notice and made an impression that has kept that meeting fresh in my mind. It was Lieutenant Fred Roberts, D.A.Q.M.G., then best known as Bobs."

And another Indian veteran describes him about that time as being "a very little man, who sat perfectly on his horse—sat, as if he were part of it, and who had the reputation of being the pluckiest, keenest, young staff officer in India." This was no small reputation to have won in five years.

In this fight at Bolandshahr, however, Roberts had another narrow escape, for he saw a sepoy take deliberate aim at him and fire. His horse, a high-spirited animal and thoroughly excited, reared and received in his head the bullet intended for his master.

As the column proceeded, they came upon a Hindu sitting under a tree, who had taken the vow of silence. But he pointed excitedly to a wooden platter at his side, and on Roberts examining it closely he found it contained in a hollow, covered

with a piece of wood, a note from General Havelock, begging any troops into whose hands it might fall to press on with all haste to him, as he sorely needed reinforcements. Another urgent appeal for help came from Agra, where the garrison, which had been shut up for three months, was now daily expecting an attack, and though it meant going fifty miles out of the way, Colonel Greathed considered it the more pressing appeal of the two.

Arrived at Agra, all trace of the rebels had vanished, and the local Intelligence Department was quite positive that they had fled many miles, and that there was no need to follow them up. Scouts, they declared, had been sent well round the country, and there was no sign to be found of the enemy. Greathed's column trustingly accepted these statements, and did not trouble therefore to reconnoitre the country for themselves. Roberts marked out the camp, and then went up to enjoy a comfortable breakfast in the fort, leaving the troops to settle down to a well-earned rest in what seemed to be a position of the utmost security. Breakfast had scarcely begun before one shot after another broke upon the air, and Roberts galloped back to find that great numbers of the sepoys who had been concealed in the fields of crops in the near neighbourhood, had seized their opportunity and attacked the camp when all was unprepared, and even piquets had not been posted. Universal confusion prevailed. Thousands of refugees, thinking that with the presence of

British troops all must be safe, had left the forts and wandered down into the town, and thousands of the inhabitants had also turned out for no other object than to see what was going on. At the sound of the first shot they all became panic-stricken, and Roberts had the greatest difficulty in fighting his way through the excited crowd of men, women, and children. In the camp, too, there was no order, for Greathed was not to be found for the moment, and no one was willing to undertake the responsibility of giving orders. But for the steadiness of the troops and the fine charges of the cavalry, the affair might have been very disastrous. As it was, the British casualties were twelve killed and fifty-four wounded, and that after the enemy had been followed right up to their camp. However, to Roberts, if to no one else, the incident brought an all-important lesson, and taught him never to trust to vague reports, but to satisfy himself as to the safety or otherwise of a position.

It had always been a matter of surprise to the column, that Colonel Greathed had been given the command over the head of Hope Grant, the colonel of the 9th Lancers, a regiment which under his leadership had done such fine work; and Hope Grant himself, who as senior regimental officer felt he had been hardly used, had been working his hardest to get back to his regiment, and to assume the position he rightly considered was his. Colonel Greathed had shown no special qualifications for his post, and after the Agra incident, the desire that Hope Grant

should take over the command became very pronounced, letters being sent to him begging him to "come on sharp; in a mail cart if possible." Such a request was not an order, but Hope Grant consulted General Penny, then commanding the district during General Wilson's absence, and also Neville Chamberlain, and it was decided to send him at once to Agra, with written orders that he should assume the command of the column. Accordingly he set out and caught up the column on the way to Manipuri, and, to quote from his own diary, "went straight to Colonel Greathed's tent, to show him General Penny's order, which he treated as a good soldier ought, and everything went on smoothly." Roberts, who had been mentioned in despatches for his good service during the fight at Agra, of course joined his staff, and served under him till the end of the mutiny.

Meanwhile Havelock and Outram had forced their way with a column into Lucknow. Baggage, stores, and practically everything save what they stood up in, had been left behind at Alumbagh, guarded by a small force, and so this entrance could not in any way be described as a "Relief of Lucknow," though the joy of the besieged garrison knew no bounds.

"From every pit, trench, and battery; from behind the sandbags piled on sheltered houses; from every post still held by a few gallant spirits; even from the hospital, there arose cheer after cheer."

Once inside the city Outram took over the command, and it quickly became clear to him that for

the present his force could only act as a reinforcement, and that the one course open to him was to strengthen and hold the Residency until the place should be fully relieved by Sir Colin Campbell, who with Hope Grant's column was on his way.

To be unable to do more was a bitter disappointment to Outram, who had been over-sanguine as to results, but the present position was inevitable, and the fact that ample food supplies still remained, made it easier for him to arrive at this decision. He occupied and fortified several outlying positions, so as to give accommodation to his troops, and the garrison was now able more effectively to hold its own against attack, besides being able to carry out several successful sorties. There was no doubt that Lucknow could now hold out for some weeks, but Outram knew only too well that under any circumstances their relief must be a matter of time, and he therefore sent out urgent messages at every possible opportunity. One of these fell into the hands of Hope Grant, who accordingly pushed forward in the direction of Cawnpore, where he was to join hands with Campbell.

The horrors of Cawnpore were brought forcibly home to every man of them, as they gazed on the places where deeds so awful had been perpetrated. To Roberts, whose heart has never become hardened in spite of all the sad sights to which a soldier is bound to steel himself, and who to-day can never see or hear of suffering unmoved, this entry into

Cawnpore called up "feelings more harrowing than it is in the power of words to express, and gave rise to reflections which were quite maddening."

But those were days for action and not for useless regrets.

Lucknow lay before them; Havelock had sacrificed nearly 700 men to help the garrison in holding out, lest the fate of Cawnpore should be theirs, and now it lay with these men to crown that deed by making all that past suffering of good avail. Troops and reinforcements were gathering together fast, and it was here for the first time that Roberts made the acquaintance of those sturdy, kilted Highlanders, who in later days he learnt to know and love so well. Here, too, he met an advance detachment of the handy men from H.M.S. *Shannon*, who at that crisis, as at every other crisis, came to the rescue with their stout hearts and ready hands.

Sir Colin Campbell, who was now Commander-in-Chief in India, sent word that he was leaving Calcutta at once, and it was a great relief to his mind to know that Hope Grant's column had reached Cawnpore. For they provided him with the troops he wanted, with cavalry and field artillery, and above all with plenty of transport. He ordered Hope Grant to start at once for Alumbâgh, where there remained a number of Havelock's sick and wounded, besides all his stores and baggage, Grant taking with him ample supplies, and then sending back all his elephants, camels, and waggons to Cawnpore,

to be used a second time. A halt was made about half-way between Cawnpore and Alumbagh, and Roberts with another staff officer rode out to fix upon a good place for the camp. They were some distance from the column, when suddenly a bullet flew past them, and as if by magic numbers of dark figures sprang up all around them. It was a case of galloping for their lives, and gallop they did, but it was a hair-breadth escape for both of them, and had they not been good riders they would have had no chance. Very bedraggled, for they had had to get through water, were the two figures which at last reached the camp in safety, and Hope Grant, grasping each one by the hand, welcomed them back warmly. "Well, my boys, well, my boys, never thought to see you again," he told them, for every one had heard the firing.

On November 5th part of the force reached Alumbagh, escorting the convoy of food and bringing back several of the sick in empty waggons; and while here Roberts, who was on high ground, was horrified, on looking down, to see our troops in the plain below fleeing in every direction. Past experience had taught him to expect an unlooked-for attack, so he rode off at once to the scene of action, only to find that the enemy on this occasion was an infuriated swarm of bees, whose nest had been broken up by an officer who had run his lance through it! Our troops bolted as they would never have bolted from a human enemy, and the cavalry

seeing their flight and not knowing the reason, formed up ready for attack, before they discovered the cause of all the commotion.

A day or two later Sir Colin Campbell himself arrived, and the whole of the force was drawn up on the plain that it might be inspected by the Chief. Here is a description by an eye-witness:—

"The field guns from Delhi looked blackened and service worn; but the horses were in good condition and the harness was in perfect repair; the gunners bronzed, stalwart, and in perfect fighting case. The 9th Lancers with their flagless lances, their gallant bearing, and their lean but hardy horses, looked the perfection of regular cavalry on active service. Wild and bold was the bearing of the Sikh horsemen, clad in loose fawn-coloured dress, with long boots, blue or red turbans and sashes, and armed with carbine and tulwar. Next to them were the worn and wasted remains of the 8th and 75th Queen's, who with wearied air stood grouped under their colours. Then came the two regiments of Punjab Infantry, tall of stature, with fierce, eager eyes under their huge turbans—men swift in the march, forward in the fight, and eager for pillage. On the left of the line, a waving sea of plumes and tartan, stood the 93rd Highlanders, who with loud cheers welcomed the veteran commander whom they knew so well and loved so warmly. They were his old familiar friends. 'Ninety-third,' he said at the end of a stirring speech, 'you are

my own lads. I rely on you to do yourselves and me credit!' 'Aye, aye, Sir Colin,' answered a voice from the ranks, 'ye ken us and we ken you. We'll bring the women and bairns out of Lucknow, or we will leave our ain bones there!'"

At sunrise next day the advance began, but before then great excitement had been caused in the camp by the news that an Irishman from Lucknow had got out of the city and through the enemy's lines, bringing a communication from Outram. The brave deed had been accomplished by Kavanagh, a civilian clerk, who, hearing that Outram wanted to convey to Sir Colin a plan of the place and other practical hints, volunteered for the dangerous errand. This was just the spirit of enterprise which delighted Outram, but he honestly pointed out all the risks before giving permission. Kavanagh got hold of an Oriental suit and dyed his skin; so complete was his disguise that only those in the secret could recognise him, and in the darkness of the night he slipped out accompanied by a trustworthy native guide. Many were the perils by land and by water which had to be overcome; once, indeed, they fell right into the enemy's hands, and the guard was turned out. But the excellent disguise, and the ready answer that "they were going to inform their father of the death of their brother, who had been killed by a shot from the British intrenchment," got them safely through, till at last came the welcome challenge from a

friendly voice, "Who goes there?" and Kavanagh was led to the Chief, who eventually recommended him for the Victoria Cross.

Acting on the lines sketched out by Outram, the army advanced to Alumbagh, which had been held for forty-nine days by less than a thousand men, and then pushed on towards the Dilkusha Palace, which was only two miles below Lucknow; and to Roberts fell the responsible work of reconnoitring the road and leading the force, work which was none too easy, considering the fields of grain through which they had to pass. The distance was only about five miles, but the problem was to choose a road along which the heavy guns could be taken, and Roberts was relieved to find a native guide who could not withstand the temptation of the substantial reward promised to him, if he pointed out a way which could be followed by the artillery. The Palace fell into our hands after very little resistance, as did the Martinière, another useful building; and having thrown up defences, Campbell brought forward supplies for fourteen days, and stored them in the Dilkusha, while from one of the highest pinnacles of the Martinière he was able to get into communication with Outram by means of signals.

Until a day or two before, Sir Colin Campbell had known nothing of young Roberts. Indeed, on finding him in a senior staff officer's tent when he had come there to give some important and secret

orders, the stern old Chief had asked bluntly: "Who is he? Can he be trusted?" But it did not take Sir Colin long to discover for himself the ability of his young staff officer, and within a week of the time he had first seen him, he sent him off on a difficult and dangerous piece of work.

On the night before the next advance was to be made, the Chief decided that there was not sufficient ammunition with the force, and he did not want any further delay.

"Can you find your way back to Alumbagh in the dark, and be here again with the ammunition by morning?" he asked Roberts.

"I am sure I can," he answered, delighted at the thought of an adventurous expedition, and at the same time bethinking himself of his native guide of the day before, whom he had put in the care of his servants, with strict orders that they were not to let him go.

Sir Colin added that it would be a difficult bit of work, and Roberts could take what escort he liked, only at all costs he must be back at daybreak, as it had been signalled to Outram that the advance would be made.

Roberts at once went to his own General, Hope Grant, to report on the orders he had received, and to arrange for the escort. The older man, knowing the great risks he would have to encounter, wished him to take some 9th Lancers, adding that "he should feel happier about him if he had Englishmen

with him." But Roberts had a scheme of his own, and wished for native cavalry, his contention being that, where everything depended on his neither being seen nor heard, native troops would move more quietly, and should any attack occur they would be less likely to get scattered in the darkness. In the end Roberts overpersuaded the General, but it was arranged that two other officers should accompany the force, Gough and Younghusband. All plans were quickly made for the start, when Roberts found out to his dismay that the native guide had escaped. This was a most serious complication, for the darkness was intense, and the unknown way to be traversed was full of pitfalls and difficulties.

"But go I must," said Roberts decidedly. "I cannot possibly go to the Chief and tell him I feel unable to carry out a duty for which he has selected me."

So the start was made, and between getting off the track which did duty for a road, and finding themselves close up to the enemy's piquets, added to the difficulty of keeping together the escort, and the long string of camels required for carrying back the ammunition, the journey was an anxious one. Moreover, there was not five minutes of time to spare, and Roberts had to keep one eye on his compass, the other on his watch. But he reached Alumbagh in safety and in good time, got the camels loaded without delay, and then, the night being half gone, set out on the return journey, during which

a' difference of opinion occurred between Roberts and Younghusband as to the right direction to make for. Gough very wisely decided to stick to Roberts, whose powers of finding his way about had become famous, and these two with the escort and the ammunition reached the Dilkusha at the dawning of the day, while Younghusband did not turn up until several hours after the force had started.

Sir Colin Campbell was rather anxiously awaiting them, knowing how easily disaster might have overtaken them, so Roberts got a warm welcome and a few hearty words of praise, which more than made up to him for the anxieties of the night. Then having made a good breakfast off a gun bullock steak, he was ordered to lead the advance guard towards Secunderbagh, where the enemy had taken up a strong position in a pleasure garden, walled all round and loopholed for musketry defence.

Here there was a desperate fight, but the naval guns battered the breach at last, "the tars seeming to look on fighting as a pleasant pastime," and then the 93rd Highlanders, led by the veteran Chief himself, rushed on, raced by the Sikhs, both determined to be first through the breach and both equally indifferent to the heavy fire poured down upon them. The rebels fought with equal courage, but at last the gate was forced in, and then came another desperate hand to hand struggle. Roses and other flowers were scattered among the dying in painful contrast; the dead lay in heaps on the ground: two

thousand of their bodies were afterwards counted, and the whole sight was a ghastly one, for our men, too, suffered heavily.

"Even in all the excitement and flush of victory, it made me feel what a horrible side there is to war," wrote Roberts afterwards, as he remembered that Garden of Death.

But night left the British masters of the situation, and then came a short spell of rest, welcome to all, but especially so to Roberts, who had been almost continuously on his horse and at high pressure, for sixty hours. With morning came the storming of the Mess House, and this being taken, Campbell ordered Roberts to take the flag of the 2nd Punjab Infantry and place it on the building as a sign to Outram that all was well. Three times was it knocked down by the enemy, and three times again did Roberts set it up. Outram was now working from the other direction, and soon another British flag floating over a building close to the Mess House showed that besiegers and besieged were at last about to join hands. Havelock and Outram came out at some risk to meet their deliverers, and volleys of cheers greeted them. Havelock, who recognised many of the men, was specially touched; his eyes became misty with tears and his voice wavered as he spoke to them: "Soldiers, I am happy to see you! Soldiers, I am happy to think you got into this place with a smaller loss than I had!"

And yet the losses of the relieving force were by

no means light—43 officers and 450 men killed or wounded, was the price paid for the deliverance of Lucknow.

In the grounds of the Mess House Sir Colin Campbell met the two Generals; and Roberts, as a staff officer, was present. It was a scene not likely to be forgotten by him. Shot and shell fell around, a last message of disappointed fury from the enemy —perhaps, after all, the most dramatic and fitting setting for so impressive a scene. Were they not all tough warriors, and was not the sound of battle the familiar sound to each of them, the sound which stirred their every pulse?

Their meeting was but a short one. There was still much to be done; and men of their calibre are not the men who waste time on words. Campbell, grave and earnest, was "thankful the garrison had been relieved"; Outram was as cheery and buoyant as if no heavy weight of responsibilities had been laid on him; Havelock seemed tired out and ill, as if, now that his object was accomplished, his brave heart could hold out no longer. Quickly they discussed as to what should be their plan of action, and Sir Colin Campbell was not long in resolving that the women and children must be the first consideration. They must be brought away in safety, and an attack on the enemy, tempting as was the thought of it, must be set aside for the moment as of secondary importance. Havelock, Outram, and Hope Grant were disappointed, and thought the attack should be

made, but Campbell was firm, and later on the course of events justified his decision.

Nothing more could be done that day; one and all needed rest. But Sir Colin allowed, neither to himself nor to his staff, comforts which were denied to the troops, who had served him so well. And so, out in the open, they all slept together,

> "While ever aloft, on the old Palace roof, the banner of England flew."

CHAPTER VI

AFTER LUCKNOW

To withdraw the women and children with the sick and wounded from Lucknow, was a feat beset with many risks, for a great force of the enemy still held positions all around, from which they could send forth a heavy fire, and the one narrow road in the rear was five miles long, and had to be guarded all the way. But Campbell had splendid nerve and coolness for work of this sort. The naval guns under Captain Peel opened a terrific fire on the Kaisar Bagh, in which place the rebels were concentrated. They took this as the first step towards an assault and awaited the attack. Still the bombardment continued; still they waited. And all the time while the roar of the guns had been the loudest, silently, and secretly at midnight, the withdrawal had taken place.

In the Dilkusha, the worn-out and overwrought women were in safety, so broken by all their sufferings that they were hardly able to realise that their deliverance had come, while only too many of them were leaving behind in the lonely burial-ground, graves which held all that remained of those who had made life dear to them.

In the Residency, only those were left who were on duty for the last time. Late in the evening all the men were called in from their different posts, each one was counted, and at twelve punctually they marched out, past Inglis and Outram, who stood at the Bailie Guard Gate. They saluted the Gate, a salute to the memory of a gallant defence. All was utter darkness save for a light from some burning guns, which, as they could not be removed, were being destroyed.

Only Inglis and Outram were left, and Outram signed to Inglis to go first. But he shook his head; he wished to be the last to leave the city which he with his men had defended so resolutely.

Outram understood, and held out his hand.

"Let us go together," he said.

And so Lucknow became empty and deserted of all living things, the scene only of great memories, of great sufferings heroically faced, of great dangers gallantly overcome.

In the face of 50,000 rebels the withdrawal was made, perfect order and discipline prevailing, every detail carried out as had been arranged. It was early morning before the Alumbagh was reached, and to Roberts fell the duty of loading up the waggons which were to carry the women, the children, and the sick from the Dilkusha to Alumbagh, a duty which he confessed to finding "bewildering in the extreme," for besides trying to get them all possible comforts, plans had to be made for their

place on the line of march, their quarters in camp, their feeding, and many other arrangements. With a master stroke of diplomacy, Roberts divided them into two parties, and over each party he set in command a married officer whose wife made one of the number under him, and so all the details of the journey were satisfactorily coped with.

One very sad event overclouded the satisfaction felt by all the troops at the events of the last few days. In the hour of victory, he who had in so large a measure helped to win it, fell at his post. After a very short illness, Havelock died, his body too weakened by work and anxiety to make one more fight for life. "Principles alone are worth living for and striving for. In public affairs as in matters eternal, the path of popularity is the broad way, and that of duty the strait gate," he had said years before. And having faithfully made Duty his lode-star, he could turn in his dying moments to Outram, and say gladly, "I have for forty years so ruled my life, that when death came I might face it without fear."

He was buried under a mango tree in the Alumbagh enclosure, and the volley over his grave was fired by the men who loved him, surely a funeral fit for one who, brave soldier as he was, had lived the simplest and hardest of lives, and had neither known nor sought for the favours of men.

Sir Colin had undertaken to escort to some place of safety two thousand helpless human beings, and of

the troops at his disposal, over four thousand had to be left with Outram at the Alumbagh. When at Cawnpore a short time before, two very definite objects had lain before him—one the relief of Lucknow, the other, the defeat of a large force of the enemy known as the Gwalior contingent, 25,000 of the best trained and best equipped of the native troops in India, which lay as "a sullen mass, a black cloud on the horizon." The former had seemed to him the more urgent of the two, and Cawnpore had been left with a garrison of 500 troops, shortly to be increased—Windham, a Crimean hero, well known as "Redan" Windham, being in command. Later on came the order to Cawnpore, that all possible reinforcements were to be hurried on towards Lucknow, and this was loyally responded to by Windham. Only, in the words of one of his junior officers, "there seemed to us to be so many starting and none returning, and we knew that the Gwalior contingent were on the move, and moving towards Cawnpore." A few days later, and Cawnpore was once more in the hands of the rebels, among their leaders being the brutal Nana Sahib, who doubtless looked forward joyfully to a second Cawnpore massacre.

Sir Colin's force moved but slowly; the heat was intense, and the long train of carts and carriages were not easily got across the country. Roberts was, as usual, with the advance guard, his special duty being to choose and mark out the camps, and then

to see that every one and everything was fitted into the right place. It was not long before he heard the sound of heavy guns coming from the direction of Cawnpore, and as no news arrived from Windham Sir Colin became anxious, and feared the worst. He had foreseen the contingency; now he must strain every nerve to meet it.

The firing went on ceaselessly, and then came two or three messages from Windham, each one bearing worse news than the last. This is the recollection of one who was with Sir Colin's force:—

"Early on the morning of the 28th the whole army was in motion, eagerly pressing forward towards the scene of danger. The anxiety and impatience of all became extreme. Louder and louder grew the roar, faster and faster became the march, long and weary was the way, tired and footsore grew the infantry; death fell on the exhausted wounded with terrible rapidity; the travel-worn bearers could hardly stagger along under their loads; the sick men groaned and died; but still 'On, on, on!' was the cry. Salvos of artillery were fired by the field battery of the advance guard, in hopes that its sound might convey to the beleaguered garrison a promise of coming aid. At last some horsemen were seen spurring along the road; then the veil which had so long shrouded us from Windham was rent asunder, and the disaster stood before us in all its deformity."

Roberts was sent to gallop forward to see if the bridge was still safe, and if so, to get in touch with

Windham, and then come back with all the news he could obtain. The bridge, he found, was so far uninjured, but the officer on guard there expressed his opinion that it would not remain safe for long, as Windham was surrounded on all sides but one, and the outlook was as black as it well could be. Roberts made his way to the intrenchments, in which, crowded together, the desperate garrison had fallen back for the night, and delivered his message to the General, who struck him as being the one cheery, calm, and collected man amidst a somewhat confused crowd. The city and cantonment he had been obliged to abandon, he explained, but the bridge of boats he was still able to protect.

Suddenly the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and across the bridge there came some cavalry and horse artillery, at their head a grey-haired man. As he passed along some of his old Crimean soldiers recognised him. It was the Chief himself! Cheer after cheer arose; the presence of this one man was as a host of strength. The enemy heard the sounds of rejoicing, and could not understand the reason. But later on they knew. No sooner had Roberts started than Sir Colin grew restive; he could not bring himself to wait, and so he made for the bridge. Here a very simple matter decided him. The same officer who had given such a gloomy report to Roberts gave it as his opinion that "Windham's men were at their last gasp."

The old Chief fired up in a second.

"How dare you say of her Majesty's troops that they are at their last gasp?" he asked in a fury.

But at once he made for the intrenchments, though they were the mark for all the fire of the victorious enemy, and his very presence there made men feel that already the situation was saved.

By morning most of Sir Colin's force had arrived. The plain was dotted with tents. Again the naval guns were to the fore, and under cover of their fire, which beat that of the enemy, the troops were got safely across the river after more than thirty hours of very anxious work. But the position of the enemy was one of great strength, and to attack it, which was the only course open to him, Sir Colin felt he would need every man he could get. Before anything could be attempted, therefore, the women and children must be got in safety to Allahabad, and between this place and Cawnpore the lines of communication must be made secure. The arrangements for this removal were left to Roberts, who himself, with some native cavalry, carefully scouted the country round, and then set himself to devise means by which the rough-and-ready carts could be made more comfortable and protected for the sick men and the weary women who had to set out on yet another journey.

On December 3rd the convoy started, and Sir Colin held his hand till it became evident that all had gone well with it.

"And now," wrote Roberts, "the time had come to give the Gwalior troops a repetition of the lesson taught them at Agra in October. They had had it all their own way since then, but on Sunday, December 6th, I awoke refreshed after a good night's rest, and in high spirits at the prospect before us. For we hoped to drive the enemy from Cawnpore, and to convince those who had witnessed, if not taken part in, the horrible brutalities perpetrated there, that England's hour had come at last."

By December 6th Sir Colin had made all his preparations, and had explained his views to the commanding officers and the staff. His plan was that while pretending to attack the centre and left of the enemy's position, to really attack their right, and so cut off their line of retreat; but to accomplish this he had only 5000 troops, a small body of cavalry, and 35 guns, as against their 25,000. Roberts watched the advance from the high ground where Hope Grant and his staff remained with the Chief. On marched the Rifle Brigade and the Highlanders, as coolly as if no fire was directed against them; and then in fine style they charged the enemy in the brick-kilns. Here came some very stiff fighting, but at the critical moment up dashed Peel with his sailors and his guns, and all together they rushed the bridge, sending the enemy flying before them. The headquarters staff moved forward as far as their deserted camp; then Sir Colin decided to follow up the routed rebels and to capture their guns.

Fourteen miles gallop, with hardly a check, and nineteen guns taken at the end of it!

That was a day which Roberts, who was at Hope Grant's side, will always class as among the best day's hunting of his life.

"Gun after gun was spiked; cartloads of ammunition lay strewed along the road. For two miles without a check, the pursuit was carried on by the 17th Battery alone, accompanied by Hope Grant and his staff. Four times in that distance did we come into action to clear our front and our flanks, until General Grant, thinking wisely we were too far from our supports, determined to wait until more cavalry arrived. Then a small cloud coming nearer and nearer was seen on the left, and the head of the cavalry column debouched from a grove. The order for a further pursuit was given; the cavalry spread like lightning over the plain in skirmishing order. Sir Colin took the lead, and the pursuit was continued, taking all the character of a fox-hunt."

So wrote the artillery officer who was with the 17th Battery. The sepoys, utterly routed, threw down their arms, as they scattered themselves far and wide, and Sir Colin declared that not one gun or ammunition waggon had escaped. More than that, the head and brain of the rebel army had been separated from its body. Roberts was promptly ordered to ride back to Cawnpore, to select a good piece of ground for the night's bivouac, and by the time the camp was marked out, and each corps as it arrived

directed to its right position, he was fairly tired and extremely hungry. Some cold mutton and bread, produced by Dighton Probyn of the Punjab Cavalry, made a feast more welcome than any costly banquet, and then all the headquarters staff settled themselves off for the night in the open; Sir Colin himself, who made a point of always sleeping where his men had to sleep, being among them.

But there still remained the centre and left of the army to be reckoned with, and during the morning came the news that these had dropped back on Bithoor. In that direction Hope Grant was sent off with a brigade to pursue them, his orders being "to use his own discretion and act upon circumstances."

Roberts, who of course accompanied him, was delighted at having at last got hold of a really reliable native guide, for in his branch of work he was very dependent on the trustworthiness and knowledge of these men. This particular guide, Unjur Tiwari by name, proved to be a host in himself, and, in common with all the other natives who came in personal contact with him, conceived a most touching devotion to Roberts. Years afterwards, when old and crippled, he always had himself carried to wherever he could catch a glimpse of his beloved master.

On December 8th the column left Cawnpore, and by daybreak next morning had covered a distance of twenty-five miles, and had reached Surajpoor. Roberts was reconnoitring with a Sikh escort, when two native cavalrymen sauntered towards him, evi-

dently mistaking the Sikhs for their own people. From one of them some valuable information was obtained, and Grant, pushing on, found that the rebels were close by, and were even then getting their guns across the river. Directly the cavalry and horse artillery came up Grant ordered the advance, no easy matter, especially for the artillery, along the heavy and uneven river-bank. Still on galloped the guns, and opened a tremendous fire which told with great effect on the enemy, who were all crowded together. They broke and fled, but their fifteen guns remained in Grant's hands, and there was only one casualty in the column, that of the General himself, who was very slightly wounded in the foot.

Sir Colin was greatly pleased. The whole of the dreaded Gwalior contingent had been defeated and dispersed, and all their guns had been taken, with less than a hundred casualties on the British side, so that he was now free to carry on the main campaign. Before another move could be made, however, he had to wait till the transport waggons which had taken "his greatest anxieties" to Allahabad returned, and so the troops settled down to a welcome rest in Cawnpore, where Roberts, with his usual craving for knowledge, spent the time in going over the ground which had been the scene of such fierce struggles, and finding out all he could about the attacks and the defences made round that ill-fated spot. He had the satisfaction, too, of

knowing that the thoroughness of his work had not escaped the notice of his senior officers, for General Hope Grant specially referred to it in his report, and the Commander-in-Chief endorsed every word of it.

Fatehgarh, situated half-way between Delhi and Allahabad, was the first place Campbell desired to retake, as here, a force of over five thousand rebels had concentrated. Between the Highland and Irish soldiers a certain amount of jealousy existed, as Sir Colin was supposed to be specially fond of the former, and to give them therefore the posts of danger and honour. So, while our troops were waiting in readiness to attack a village from whence the enemy were pouring out a heavy fire, the Irishmen, determined to be well to the front, took the law into their own hands, and without waiting for orders dashed forward and completely cleared out the enemy. Sir Colin was furious, galloped up to the regiment and reprimanded them sharply, but all in vain, for each remark he made, they drowned with a cry of, "Three cheers for the Commander-in-Chief, boys!" till his anger melted away and he left them laughing.

The enemy were retiring, and then came a chance for Hope Grant with his cavalry. Leading them finely, he crashed in on the flank of the rebel forces as they were making their way along the high road. Taken entirely by surprise, supreme panic prevailed among the enemy, and Hope Grant's

cavalry carried all before them. The rout was complete; everything fell into the hands of the victors; and throwing down their arms, those sepoys who escaped with their lives, fled in the wildest confusion. In the full excitement of the charge, Roberts had already done one gallant deed in going to the rescue of a loyal native soldier, who must have been killed but for his assistance; and before the day was over, another chance of distinguishing himself had come in his way, a chance which he seized upon, and which won for him that bronze medal with its unvarnished inscription, "For Valour," the dearest treasure in the world to every British soldier. Seeing two sepoys making off with a standard, he determined to get it away from them, and galloping after them, made for them, with drawn sword. Seizing the pole of the standard, he tried to wrench it from the hand of the man who held it, but the second man pointed his musket straight at him and fired. By an extraordinary bit of good luck the piece failed to explode, and the next moment the one sepoy had fled, the other lay dead, and Roberts held the standard in his hands.

That evening, the high spirits of the troops knew no bounds, and as the cavalry came riding back, Sir Colin received an ovation which touched him deeply.

"In front came the 9th Lancers, with three captured standards at their head, the wild looking Sikh-horsemen rode in the rear. As they passed the Commander-in-Chief, he took off his hat to them

with some words of praise and thanks. The Lancers shook their lances in the air and cheered; the Sikhs took up the cry, waving their sabres above their heads. The men carrying the standards gave them to the wind; the Highland Brigade, who were encamping close by, ran down and cheered both the victorious cavalry and the veteran chief, waving their bonnets in the air. It was a fair sight, a reminder of the old days of chivalry."

Without opposition the force marched next day to Fatehgarh, from which place the rebels had fled in such haste that they left much valuable stuff behind them. Then came a long pause. The whole army expected to move forward; the weather was cool, the health and spirits of the men good. Yet day after day the camp remained stationary, and after the first few days of welcome rest in the shaded grove, the troops began to clamour for action. Gradually the cause of delay leaked out, which proved to be a difference of opinion between Sir Colin Campbell and the Governor-General, Lord Canning, as to the course of action to be taken now. The former naturally looked at events from purely a soldier's point of view; the Governor-General had to take into consideration other sides of the question, and he strongly urged that Lucknow should be retaken at once, as everything would stand or fall for the natives by what happened in Oude; while Sir Colin held that Lucknow could wait till the autumn and be the crowning-point of a campaign, reached when every step leading up

to it had been made secure. So strongly did Canning and the Government of India insist, that Sir Colin had no option but to act on their opinion, and it is now generally admitted that their judgment was the right one.

Nothing could have been better in tone and spirit than the letters which passed between the two chiefs, and Sir Colin with the utmost loyalty set himself to the task laid upon him. He had a siege train equipped, guns, ammunition, and stores brought up, and by the end of February was on his way towards Lucknow, a really large force under his command, which amounted to thirty thousand men, and over a hundred and fifty guns by the time all the reinforcements had arrived. Those were the days when an enormous amount of transport accompanied every force, and Roberts had a continuous and somewhat monotonous sphere of work before him in superintending the passage of troops and stores over the bridge of boats, and marking out the camps to be occupied by all the different brigades. But in this, as in everything else he undertook, he delighted all those with whom he came in contact. "Roberts is a rare man," wrote an adventure-loving sailor, Captain Oliver Jones, who had managed to get out to see what campaigning in India was like, "one who, to uncommon daring and bravery in the field, and unflinching hard-working discharge of duty in the camp, adds the charm of cheering unaffected kindness and hospitality in the tent. His acquaintance and

friendship are high prizes to those who obtain them."

Hope Grant was in charge of the cavalry division, and on reaching the Alumbagh and Dilkusha, the important duty of placing the outposts was handed over to him, as the Commander-in-Chief had formed the highest opinion of his foresight and caution. Roberts rode round with him while engaged in this, and has more than once gratefully acknowledged how many useful hints and lessons he received from this finest of cavalry officers.

From the 3rd of March to the 22nd the struggle continued for the possession of a city twenty miles in circumference, defended by 120,000 men, who for three months had worked to make every point secure. Then the rebels saw that the game was up, and once more the flag of England waved over Lucknow. Roberts had for some time been ailing, and only his own high spirits, and his determination to hold out while there was anything to be done, had kept him going through these last months of terrible strain. But there are limits to any man's power of endurance, and when once Lucknow had been taken, his health broke down badly. He declared a change to the hills would set him up, but the doctors wisely insisted on England, and so, early in April, when he had completed six years of eventful service in India, such years as rarely fall to the lot of any young man to live through, he left Lucknow, carrying with him the good wishes of every one, from the Commander-in-

Chief, who praised him warmly and promised him promotion, to the soldiers themselves, who had found that he always treated them with the kindliest consideration.

"Roberts is as good as he is brave," wrote a brother officer at that time, and certainly there can have been few regrets to overcloud his natural happiness, as he set sail for England early in the May of 1858. Behind him lay work conscientiously done, hardships pluckily faced, dangers safely overcome, and the proud memory of having been closely and intimately associated with such men as Nicolson, Lawrence, Havelock, Campbell, Chamberlain, and Hope Grant, with many others of lesser fame, whose names light up with undying brilliancy, pages which would otherwise have been dark and disastrous. Before him lay the pleasurable prospect of a holiday at home, among those most dear to him, and to crown all, was the knowledge that he had made some progress along the path of duty, which is the one true way to glory.

CHAPTER VII

THE ABYSSINIAN EXPEDITION

SIR ABRAHAM and Lady Roberts had made their home in Waterford, which was then a very lively little garrison town, and there was no small excitement among the people in the place, when it was known that the young soldier, who had been through such thrilling experiences with so much honour to himself, was coming to stay in their midst.

Cameras and biographs had not followed the fortunes of our troops in India, and the news which had reached England had been of far too scanty a nature to satisfy the intense interest which had been aroused in the country, stirring it to the very core. Here in "little Freddy Roberts" was one who could tell of things he had seen, who had taken part in all the chief acts of that tragic drama, and who at the same time, was "a most modest and unaffected young man, full of intelligence, and with a happy knack of describing all his experiences in a perfectly simple and straightforward way." Small wonder then that the good people of Waterford made much of him.

It was a very quiet life which he lived for the next few months, but he found pleasure in it all, in the delight of being once more with his father, who

seemed to him as strong and vigorous as ever; of seeing his mother, who to his joy was "even more beautiful than when he had left her"; and of gazing on the fresh green trees and fields of home, a delicious rest to eyes "wearied with the deadly whitey-brown sameness of dried-up sandy plains."

Before his leave was up, he became engaged to a young lady who was staying with her married sister near Waterford, and of whom he had therefore seen a great deal. Herself a soldier's daughter, she was ready to become a soldier's wife, and to face the hardships and discomforts of life in a far-off land, with the husband of her choice. They were married in May, and in the middle of his honeymoon Roberts was commanded to go to Buckingham Palace, that the Queen might herself give him the Victoria Cross. He had asked for three months extra leave to save his wife the trying journey through the Red Sea in the intense heat, but he was told that unless he went out at once he would lose the chance of a good appointment in the Quartermaster-General's Department, and that decided the matter for both of them. In June they set sail, and almost immediately on his arrival Roberts was put in charge of all the camp arrangements in connection with the great tour which was to be made by Lord Canning through Oude to the Punjab, that he might meet the native chiefs, and reward those who had not wavered in their loyalty. The Commander-in-Chief had specially recommended him for the post in a private letter to

Lord Canning, describing him as "a particularly gentlemanlike, intelligent and agreeable young officer."

Events in India had changed during the year Roberts had been at home. The Mutiny had died out; in the face of the fiercest opposition "Clemency Canning" had held to his policy of conciliation, "mercy without weakness, and indulgence without compromise" being his watchwords. The government of India had passed from the East India Company to the Crown, and this had been announced in a Royal Proclamation, read with great pomp and ceremony at every military and civil station in India on the 1st of November 1858, the Queen herself having drafted the womanly and noble words, which breathed of justice to all creeds and classes, freedom, generosity, and good government. Lord Canning was appointed as first Viceroy.

"It is," he wrote in acknowledgment to the Queen, "Lord Canning's earnest hope and prayer, that so long as this high function shall be in his trust, it may be administered in a spirit not unworthy of your Majesty, and that when he shall deliver it again into your Majesty's hands, it shall be found to be without spot or stain from any act or word of his."

The tour, the first of the kind ever made, was to be carried out on a gorgeous and magnificent style, with all the pomp which is so dear to the heart of Eastern people, and which alone can impress them with awe or admiration. No small responsibility

was laid on Roberts, who had to collect the tents, provide for the troops, and the long trains of servants, and arrange for elaborate ceremonies, all of which duties were certainly strange and new to a young soldier, whose only school as yet had been one of the sternest active service.

But he threw himself heart and soul into the preparations, and when Lord and Lady Canning joined the camp at Cawnpore, both were delighted with the arrangements which had been made.

Mrs. Roberts went with her husband, and together they passed through the places which but a short while before he had seen under circumstances in such vivid contrast to the present. The mud parapet thrown up at Cawnpore by the desperate garrison still stood in some places, but the site of the well was covered with weeds, and close to the spot where the last stand had been made, there was now pitched the camp of the Commander-in-Chief, while the splendour of the State entry into Lucknow later on called up memories of that other entry, when every inch of the ground had to be fought for and dearly won.

Now all was changed. "Everywhere could be seen signs of public rejoicing. There were brilliant cavalcades, processions of elephants. The streets were lined with multitudes, eagerly gazing, wrapt in attention. The house-tops were crowded with spectators. There were brilliant illuminations, with the spray of fountains and the flash of lights, and the

forms of mosques and temples were marked by luminous lights against the black sky. Traitors at heart, who had vainly imagined that the British power was burnt to ashes, now saw it rising, Phœnix-like, grander than ever."

One after another all the old spots were visited, Agra, Meerut, and Delhi included; and in spite of his responsibilities the Camp Commandant thoroughly enjoyed the tour. All went well in his department, thanks to his own grasp of details and his untiring energy. His wife was greatly interested in a life so new and full of variety, while Lady Canning, most charming of women, never failed in her turn to study their comfort and to include them in every pleasure where possible. From a political point of view also, the expeditions were altogether successful.

On hearing that a force was to be sent to China, under Hope Grant, Roberts was very eager to accompany it, and was extremely disappointed at finding Sir Colin Campbell had passed him over. A few days later there came an explanation, for the old Chief took Mrs. Roberts in to dinner one evening and remarked "that he had not sent her husband, knowing how trying it would be for her to be left so soon alone in a strange country; and," he added, "I think I have earned *your* gratitude if I have not managed to satisfy every one by these China appointments."

To his amazemert the young wife looked at the

matter in a very different light. "I am afraid," she said, "I cannot be altogether grateful to you for making my husband feel that I am ruining his career, by standing in the way of his being sent on service. You have done your best to make him regret his marriage."

This was too much for Sir Colin. "I will never try and help a woman again," he declared. "I did the one thing I thought you would like, and I have only succeeded in making you angry."

But in his heart he admired her plucky determination to put her husband's career before her own private feelings, and the two became firm friends.

When the last of the tours had been accomplished, Roberts returned to Simla, the army headquarters, and then followed a spell of office work and office routine, of which there was more than a usual amount to be done at this particular time. For with the ending of the Mutiny, the old order of things had passed away and the new order had to be brought into being. The army of the East India Company had no longer a separate existence, but was merged into one force known as the Queen's Army, an arrangement which was bitterly resented by many of the Company's troops, who declared it to be a breach of faith. In the end such men as were discontented were allowed the option of returning to England, and this nearly two-thirds decided to do. To make up the deficiency, a

large number of recruits were brought out from home. Then there were the officers to be considered, as the disbanding of native regiments, the creating of irregular forces, and the filling up of important posts, had quite upset the old machinery, and had thrown everything out of gear. Many schemes were suggested, talked out, and found to be unworkable, till at last one, drawn up by Colonel Norman, was accepted, and resulted in the formation of the Indian Staff Corps, a body which all officers thrown out of work by the dislocation of the last few years could join, and in which there was a regular plan for promotion. All these changes brought an enormous amount of work through the department in which Roberts was engaged, work which was very well worth the doing, and yet which was, to say the least of it, monotonous.

As one result of the new arrangements, he obtained his promotion, and jumped very quickly from the rank of lieutenant to that of brevet-major, this last step being a reward for his services through the Mutiny. Sir Hugh Rose, who had succeeded Sir Colin Campbell as commander-in-chief, took a fancy to Roberts from the first, a piece of good fortune which the young officer declared was entirely owing to the fact that Sir Hugh noticed and admired the beautiful Arab horse he was riding the day when all the staff went out to meet him on his arrival at Simla. But any one who knew the strict old soldier, with his keen sense of discipline and

justice, knew that no beautiful Arab horse would have won for its rider a place on his staff, had not that rider proved himself fully worthy.

Thorough in carrying out all he undertook, and a hard worker who never spared himself, Sir Hugh started at once on a flying visit through the country, that he might inspect the troops, and see all he could for himself, and he specially picked out Roberts, who was now a recognised authority on travelling through India, to go with him. They went as far as the Derajat frontier, a new part of the country then to Roberts, but one which in later years he learnt to know all too well, and also over the districts where Sir Hugh Rose had made his reputation, and where he was received with the greatest enthusiasm.

Once back at headquarters again, the Chief turned his attention to bracing up the tone and discipline of the army generally, and took especial trouble in working out schemes to provide the men with more recreations and interests in their spare time, so that when his five years were up and he returned to England, to the great regret of all, it was admitted universally that never had the army in India been in such an efficient state.

But before long Roberts had another taste of the active service which was so much to his liking; for in 1863, trouble broke out on the North-West Frontier, which was not settled until nearly forty English officers and 800 men had been killed or wounded in the battles round the Mahaban mountain.

For years past, a set of desperate and violent outlaws from a village called Sitana, had been freely swooping down on, and devastating our territories, kidnapping, robbing, and occasionally murdering, the peaceful and friendly traders on the high roads. Already one expedition had been sent against them and had successfully driven them off, while the neighbouring rulers had signed an agreement promising to keep these fanatics out of Sitana. But the links and traditions which exist between these tribes, who love fighting for its own sake, and who are continually engaged in quarrels among themselves, invariably bind them together against an outside foe, and such an agreement was of no real value.

It was not long before the fanatics, supplied with fresh fighting men and money, were carrying on their old game. Lord Elgin, the Viceroy, was against embarking on another expedition, and Denison, the cool-headed, far-seeing Governor of Madras, declared that "to meddle with these hill people at all at this time was very impolitic, for that in attacking them we had nothing to gain and everything to risk." But Elgin was overpersuaded by the Governor of the Punjab, who was confident that this was the moment when a blow could and should be struck effectively; and though Sir Hugh Rose strongly urged waiting for a few months, till more troops and better transport could be provided, the Government decided that the expedition should set off at once.

General Neville Chamberlain was given the com-

mand, and it was no fault of his or of his troops, that at first things went badly. It was necessary that the British force should make for the Umbeyla Pass, and to do this meant marching through the country of the Buners, a tribe of whom little was known except that they had nothing in common with the fanatics, and were disposed to be friendly. Chamberlain was assured by those who should have known, that no opposition need be feared from these Buners. At the same time, though relying on their friendliness, no notice was given to them that a British force was to pass through their valley until the last moment, and then, not unnaturally, their suspicions were aroused. True, a proclamation had been sent in a hurried way, assuring them that no harm would be done to them, nor would their independence be interfered with; but, as it was sensibly remarked at the time, "even supposing the proclamations ever reached their destination, was it likely that a brave race of ignorant men would stop to consider the meaning of a paper they could not read, when the arms of a supposed invader were glistening at their door?" The fanatics had also worked cleverly on the feelings of the excitable Buners, as a letter which later on fell into our hands showed clearly.

"The infidels," they had written, "are extremely deceitful and treacherous, and will, by whatever means they can, come into these hills and declare to your people that they have no quarrel with them.

It is therefore proper for you not to give in to their deceit, for when they get an opportunity they will ruin, torment, and put you to many indignities, appropriate to themselves your wealth and possessions, and injure your faith." So the Buners decided to oppose the British force; Chamberlain met with a sudden and unlooked-for check, and what had been undertaken simply as a small expedition, became nothing short of a frontier war.

The Akhoord of Swat, whose power over the hill and plain tribes was great, joined the Buners, and soon all the hills round the Umbeyla Pass were occupied by thousands of those who had answered his call. Chamberlain held two important and commanding points, the Eagle's Nest and the Crag Piquet, but the tribesmen held still higher ridges; so with their great numbers and their inborn knowledge of this mountain warfare, they delivered one furious assault after another, and at three different times took the Crag Piquet, though it was always wrenched back from them by Chamberlain's force, who possessed all the dash and the daring of their leader. But our losses were heavy, and it was felt that the aspect was serious. When the news came that Chamberlain and Colonel Hope, the commander of the Highland Brigade, had been seriously wounded, and that nothing but a defensive position was possible, the Governor of the Punjab took alarm, and expressed the opinion that as it would be some while before reinforcements could arrive, and as anything

like a disaster would have a most dangerous effect, coming at that time, Chamberlain's force should withdraw to the plains, and the whole expedition should be abandoned. To add to all the other difficulties, Lord Elgin, the Governor-General, was dying, and for the moment there was no responsible head.

Sir Hugh Rose, on hearing the bad news, at once moved to Lahore, and was indignant at the words "withdraw and abandon." But before taking any decided action, he resolved to hear first hand the exact state of affairs, and sent off two officers on whose opinions he could rely, to bring back a report to him. These officers were Colonel Adye and Major Roberts. They found the British camp well intrenched, but the fighting had told seriously on their numbers, and Roberts was much distressed at seeing Chamberlain suffering greatly from his wound. Still no one in the force would hear of withdrawal now, and after carefully looking at the matter from every point, both the special officers formed the same opinion. Reinforcements were being hurried along, and though the tribesmen were a dangerous and powerful combination, they already seemed out of spirits and unsettled; so that with the arrival of more troops there was no reason why a successful forward move should not be taken, while, for the moment, the force held one of the strongest positions possible.

Sir William Denison, Acting Governor, was a good

soldier and a shrewd man. In strong, clear language he protested against "so cowardly a policy as a withdrawal, which could only have a moral effect of the worst description," and telegraphed to Sir Hugh Rose at Lahore telling him to carry on the expedition with vigour, and assuring him of his entire confidence. General Garvock was given the command, and under him were nine thousand men, all thirsting for a fight.

The Buners changed their tone, and in a half-hearted way sent their envoys to talk of peace and compromise, but Garvock wisely judged that for the sake of the future, a decisive blow should be struck now, and as he saw the watch-fires of the tribesmen on all the hills around him, and counted their standards, which told of thousands of men assembled there, he knew that an attack on his position was imminent. So he resolved to strike first.

He divided his force into two brigades, one under Colonel Wilde, and one under Colonel Turner, and marched towards the highest point overlooking the ridge, on the top of which stood the enemy at bay. The regiments were formed under shelter of the broken ground, and when the "Advance" was sounded, 5000 men rose from their cover with rounds of cheers and volleys of musketry and rushed to the assault. From rock to rock they sprang forward, capturing at the point of the bayonet one defence after another, and though the hill-men fought stubbornly, they could not hold their ground.

Roberts watched it all with enthusiastic admiration, so steady was the advance, so resolute the assault, in spite of the shower of bullets poured on them, or the great stones heaved at them. There came a shout of victory from the Fusiliers, who reached first the highest peak, and the enemy fled down the hill hotly chased. Next morning Garvock's troops were again on the move, this time towards the Churule Valley, and Roberts went with Wilde's Brigade to point out the way for the mountain batteries—the light guns, which had been of the greatest value, as they could go over any roads and come into action however small the space available.

Again the enemy showed splendid fighting power, but again the British troops, backed up, very often stimulated, by the Sikhs and Goorkhas, whose gallantry and loyalty throughout the whole campaign was conspicuous, drove them from one stronghold to another. Only once during the day had our position been critical, and then it was saved by Roberts.

The Sikh Pioneer Regiment and the 7th Fusiliers were advancing to the base of some hills, when a band of Ghazis, who had been hidden in some broken ground covered with jungle, rushed out in a fierce attack, and in a few seconds had singled out the officers, who soon lay killed or wounded on the ground. Leaderless and broken up by the suddenness of the attack, the Pioneers staggered

for a moment, and fell back on their reserve. Roberts, who with another staff officer was near, grasped the situation, and rushing in among the Pioneers he called on them to rally and follow him. The men knew him, his cool courage gave them just the steadying power they needed. They responded at once. The Ghazis were repulsed and routed, and the war practically was ended, while the Buners came eagerly forward to beg for peace.

First and foremost, it was held that the original object of the expedition must be carried out, and that Malka, the settlement of the fanatics, must be destroyed. The only question was as to whether a column from Garvock's force should be sent on to do this, or whether it should be left to the Buners, a small British force going with them to see the work was properly carried out. Both courses were open to danger, as a column might be cut off by the retreating hill-men, or treachery on the part of the Buners might end in a disaster to the officers and their escort who accompanied them. But the second course was chosen for many reasons, and Roberts with six other officers, some cavalry, and the leading Buners with two thousand of their followers, set out to witness the burning of Malka.

It is more accurate to say that two thousand Buners had been the number decided on, but barely a hundred started, though our officers were assured that the remainder were waiting a little way farther on. No signs of them, however, were forthcoming,

and eventually the Buner chiefs explained that they thought it safer not to travel with so large a force! Malka, a fine village built of pinewood, was burned on December 22—this outward and visible sign of their defeat being watched by thousands of mountaineers, who gathered round in sullen, resentful anger. The native guides with the British officers were alarmed, declaring that the hill-men were vowing vengeance, and cut off as they were from their own camp by a distance of twenty miles, they could not but feel that they were in great danger of being fallen upon and murdered. Sir Hugh Rose had been apprehensive when he had heard of the arrangement come to.

"Madness, madness!" he had said. "Not one of them will come back alive!" And indeed they had but a hair-breadth escape. That no disaster took place was due to the presence of mind of Colonel Reynell Taylor, whose very calmness in the midst of those excited crowds overawed them, and also to the chief of the Buners, a grey-haired patriarch, who addressed the fanatics.

"If you murder these English," he declared, "you must kill us first, for we have sworn to protect them with our lives!"

His words turned the scale, and the British officers set out for their own camp, though they could hardly consider themselves safe until they reached it, as the enemy followed them over the hills all the way, and more than once threatened to swoop

down on them. Roberts managed to join his wife at Peshawur on Christmas Day, and found her terribly anxious, as she had overheard Sir Hugh Rose's remark. But it was an anxiety quickly turned to joy, and later on, to both came the pleasure of knowing that Roberts had again added to his reputation, and that the Commander-in-Chief had recommended his being made a Brevet-Colonel as his reward.

This very reasonable recommendation was, however, not forwarded by the Viceroy, who considered Roberts "too young for such promotion," though at that time he was thirty-two. It was just one of those acts of official stupidity and conservatism, which have, before and since, disheartened ambitious and hard-working officers, and it is not the only time in his career that Roberts has found himself held back by red-tape. But he was far too good a soldier to be injured by the disappointment, and he turned from the delights of frontier fighting and outdoor life, back to the tedious routine of office work, and to the extra work of compiling a Bengal route book, which demanded so much writing and close confinement that it quite knocked him up.

Both the Commander-in-Chief and the Governor-General, however, were delighted with the book, and complimented him warmly on the care and ability with which he had prepared it; and on its completion, as by then he was really ill, Roberts was given a year's

leave. He sailed in the *Renown* as officer in command, on board being several hundred old soldiers, time-expired men, many of whom, knowing that they were no longer under the old strict discipline, had broken loose on the way down country, and were therefore brought up to him for punishment at the first inspection parade. To their surprise, he adopted an altogether unlooked-for line towards them, and told them that as he had to spend some time on board ship with them, he did not want to begin with anything so disagreeable as punishments. Over the past, therefore, he would wipe a sponge, and he trusted to their honour to show that he was right in so doing by behaving well throughout the voyage. As might have been expected, the men did not disappoint him; he had appealed to their best side, and they responded to the call.

The long journey backwards and forwards left but a short time for England itself, and the March of 1866 found Roberts again on his way to India, where Sir William Mansfield now ruled as Commander-in-Chief. A terrible outbreak of cholera at Allahabad, where he was stationed, made the next few months a sad and anxious time, for he spent many hours of each day in the various cholera camps, greatly distressed at the scene of so much suffering and so many deaths, while at the same time he felt it part of his duty to get up all kinds of amusements and entertainments for the men outside, as anything like depression or panic among them only increased the

likelihood of their falling ill. But the experience was a painful and depressing one, and it was with feelings of delight that he heard of an expedition which was to be sent to Abyssinia.

As his old battery was one of those certain to go, he went off in haste to the Commander-in-Chief, and asked, if now that the cholera was over, he might give up his staff appointment, and rejoin his battery, so as to be certain of seeing some more active service. To his great surprise he was given the appointment of Assistant-Quartermaster-General to the Bengal Brigade, then under orders for Abyssinia, the most responsible post he had yet held, but one for which Sir William Mansfield declared him to be "eminently qualified, by his activity and well-known military qualities, as well as by his experience in the Quartermaster's Department in peace and war for nearly ten years." Roberts had seen and learnt enough, to know how greatly any force could be helped or hindered in their objects according to the manner in which their transport arrangements were worked; and now that the sole responsibility of organising all the details for the Bengal Field Force lay on his shoulders, he determined that nothing should be left to settle itself, but that the whole thing should be run on a system, carefully planned and thoroughly carried out. Nothing had seemed to him more unsatisfactory than the old way of separating troops from all their equipment, so that when they landed at

a place they had to wait there until such times as the various ships arrived which carried their horses and mules, their saddles, their supplies, or their field hospitals. His first great reform lay in sending off every detachment of men completely equipped, so that on landing they were ready to start at once. Such an arrangement bore common sense on the face of it, yet it was left to Roberts to think of it, and the fact that he did think of it and carry it through, is very characteristic of the sound, thorough work he has always put into everything. Whatever it has fallen to his lot to do, he has done it with all his might, and with that good sense and foresight which are even more important qualities in a general than the dashing courage which tries to retrieve a dangerous situation; when such a situation need never have been brought about.

Sir Robert Napier was in command of the expedition, a man of very vast ideas and quite reckless in the matter of expense.

"If you want a job well done, send Napier," was a remark which had become proverbial.

But the very lavishness of his schemes led to friction with those who held the purse strings, and no sooner was he appointed to this command, chiefly through the influence of the Duke of Cambridge, than he declared he must have more troops and a much more liberal scale of transport. At first the Bombay Government demurred, but Napier, behind the most courtly manners and simple character,

had a way of always gaining his point. He did so in this case, and future events proved that he had in nowise overestimated his requirements.

The object of the expedition was to rescue a number of Europeans, including Mr. Rassam and Captain Cameron, English officials, who for no good reason had been kept prisoners by King Theodore, himself a man full of the most contradictory qualities. His pride and his jealousy overruled much that was good, brave, and clever, and he always gave as the justification for holding the English prisoners, that Queen Victoria had not immediately answered a letter he had written to her. Messengers and letters having been forwarded to him, always to be treated with contemptuous disregard, it became evident that only an armed force would have any effect, and a proclamation from Sir Robert Napier was sent to him as well as to the chiefs and governors.

Part of it read as follows:—

"The sole object for which the British force has been sent to Abyssinia, is the liberation of her Majesty's servants and others unjustly detained as captives, and as soon as that object is effected, it will be withdrawn. When the time comes for the march of a British army through your country, bear in mind, people of Abyssinia, that the Queen of England has no unfriendly feeling towards you, and no design against your country or your liberty."

However, there was a good deal of delay before the expedition set out, chiefly on account of much

difference of opinion between Napier and the Bombay Government as to the transport arrangements for the whole force, Roberts, it must be remembered, being only responsible for that belonging to the Bengal Brigade. The confusion and muddle of the general arrangements, the want of organisation, and above all the want of discipline, were object-lessons to Roberts, showing him how *not* to manage. Mules were bought and sent from Egypt, Persia, and different places, and with them were sent drivers who defied all authority, and knowing their value, struck at every opportunity, added to which they lost, starved, and ill-treated their animals. Saddles also were sent which made no pretence of fitting, and altogether chaos reigned, which it took all Napier's powers to unravel.

It was early in January 1868 when the expedition landed at Zula, and Napier saw that the difficulty "would be not in beating the enemy, but in reaching him." Fighting and strategy would play a very small part in this campaign compared to the less interesting work of making roads, railways, and bridges, keeping open long lines of communications and organising for sufficient supplies.

"At Zula," wrote an officer, "beat the heart from which the life stream flowed, that must pulsate through the long artery of the line of communications, and carry food to the farthest outposts. The army throughout the campaign depended almost entirely for everything on the ships and the depôt

stored from the harbour. Never were operations carried on in a country so unfavourable to war."

With everything, therefore, depending on the organisation at Zula, it was all important that a most capable officer should remain there in charge of the Quartermaster-General's Department, and the choice fell upon Roberts. In one sense this was a great disappointment to him, for it meant all the hard work of a campaign, in a very trying climate, without any of the active fighting and interest, as his work consisted almost entirely in superintending the disembarkation and forwarding of men, animals, and stores. "But the way he stuck to it was beyond all praise," is the testimony of a brother officer who had the good fortune to see all that was to be seen of the expedition. "He threw himself into it heart and soul, just as if it had been the one thing he enjoyed doing, and thanks to him, everything ran smoothly."

Meanwhile King Theodore, declaring himself to be "the greatest power on earth," scornfully refused to enter into any communication with Napier, or even to read a letter.

"I will do no such thing as confer with that man. He has been sent by a woman!" was his invariable reply.

So the British troops pushed forward, took up positions round Magdala, and in a small battle completely overcame such feeble resistance as was offered by the Abyssinian army.

"I thought your people were women, but I find they are men," remarked Theodore naïvely to the prisoners he still held.

Sir Robert Napier then made a new attempt. "Your Majesty fought like a brave man, but has been overcome by the superior power of the British army," he wrote. "It is my desire that no more blood may be shed. If, therefore, your Majesty will deliver over all prisoners in safety this day to the British camps, I guarantee honourable treatment for yourself, and all the members of your Majesty's family."

By this time Theodore had seen that it was useless for him to hold out. He had no authority over his army. "Although I have punished my soldiers, yet would they not return!" he wrote to Napier. Then he released the prisoners, after assuring them that though he had behaved ill to them through the persuasions of bad men, he nevertheless had a great regard for them; and a few hours later he shot himself deliberately.

His work being accomplished, Napier hurried his men with all possible speed out of so trying a climate, and to Roberts came a very unexpected but welcome reward. None knew better than the Chief how to appreciate the invaluable work he had done at the base, and it was Roberts whom he selected as the officer to carry the despatches back to England. Besides the honour of being chosen for this purpose, it was a great delight to Roberts, as his wife was in England;

and starting with little delay he reached London one Sunday evening in the end of June. He promptly carried the despatches to the Secretary of State for India, who having read them, requested him to take them on at once to the Duke of Cambridge. Arriving at Gloucester House, he found the Duke had a dinner party, and the servant said he could not be disturbed. Roberts then handed over the papers, saying that they must be at once given up to the Commander-in-Chief, and leaving his address in case he should be wanted, he went back to his club. He was quickly followed there by one of the A.D.C.'s, who took him back to Gloucester House, where he was cordially welcomed by the Duke, and put through a long list of questions as to his experiences in Abyssinia, by the other royal guests dining there.

Very soon afterwards he was given a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonelcy, for the manner in which he had "carried out very arduous duties to the satisfaction of all." And so another rung of the ladder was mounted. It was just at this time that the five years for which he had held his staff appointment came to an end, and he had a great longing to do some work with his regiment, especially to command a battery of Horse Artillery. This was being specially arranged for by the Duke of Cambridge, when a letter came from the army headquarters in India, telling Roberts that a fresh appointment had been formed in the Quartermaster-General's Department, and offering the new post to

him. It meant another five years of staff work, and was too good a chance to be passed over, in spite of the attractions of the Horse Artillery. So he was soon on his way back to India; and a year later Napier, now Lord Napier of Magdala, who thought most highly of him, became Commander-in-Chief.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LUSHAI EXPEDITION

For the next two years Roberts lived chiefly at Simla as Acting-Quartermaster-General, and over and above his official work, he found time to draw up two volumes of transport regulations, besides learning to become a telegraph clerk, his reason for mastering the latter accomplishment being that during the Umbeyla campaign the telegraph clerks unfortunately all fell ill at the same time, causing the greatest inconvenience thereby, as no one could send or read messages. Such a predicament he decided should never occur again in any place where he might happen to be, so at the first opportunity he set to work on a course of electric telegraphy.

And then came another expedition; this time into the country of the Lushais, a people inhabiting a district lying between South-Eastern Bengal and Upper Burma, on the borders of which were large tea plantations. Gradually these tea gardens had spread farther and farther into the heart of the country, and so farther away from any protection, thus offering too great a temptation to the raid-loving Lushais; and the planters had for some time been

appealing to the Government to come to their assistance, and punish these people who bore down on their property, damaged it, and carried off all on which they could lay their hands. The crisis came when in one of these raids the Lushais murdered an Englishman, a Mr. Winchester, who was only on a visit to that particular garden, and took back with them as a prisoner his little girl, after which it was evident that steps must be taken, if British subjects were to carry on their trade there with any security.

Lord Napier drew up a scheme for the expedition, which was to be divided into two columns, composed entirely of native troops, and taking with them the smallest possible amount of baggage. Tents even were to be left behind, mackintosh sheets being served out in place of them, and everything in the way of transport was to be cut down to the lowest point, because Lushai had no roads, only uncompromising ridges, valleys consisting of forest and jungle, rivers and streams most difficult to cross. To Roberts fell the task of fitting out and sending off both columns, Napier declaring that he had the fullest confidence in his ability to cope with these many obstacles; and when this portion of his work was finished, his orders were to join the column under General Bourchier at Cachar, the base from which it was to work. Once on the spot, it was plain that the difficulties had in no way been exaggerated, and Roberts, who went out to

explore routes, found only rough tracks literally trellis-worked with festoons of creepers and canes, while underfoot, tangled thorns and shrubs made pitfalls at every step. Added to this was the want of water, the extreme unhealthiness of the climate, and, as the last straw, an outbreak of cholera among the coolies, which led to many of them dying and still more deserting in terror, thus throwing an extra strain on the force already none too large.

Roberts had started on the campaign far from well, and the intense moist had told on him. But he was never the man to give in, and so with the others he worked away with a will, till at last a slow progress was made. Five miles a day was the utmost distance which could be accomplished, cutting a way through such a country. The actual fighting was not a very serious matter, and Roberts, who several times led the column, greatly dismayed the Lushais by his plan of attacking them from the rear as well as from the front, tactics he had observed to be always disconcerting to untrained fighting men. But the hardships and annoyances of the campaign were unending, and long weary marches, which ultimately proved to be in the wrong direction, were made more than once, so impossible was it to be sure of any route in this roadless country. The second column had been successful in rescuing little Mary Winchester and the other prisoners, but General Bourchier

insisted on pushing forward into the country of Lalbura, the leader of all the raids; and somewhat to the surprise of the force, no opposition was offered. Lalbura himself had fled, but his headmen agreed to all the terms laid down, and then the British flag was hoisted on a tree in front of the skull-decorated tomb of Lalbura's father, and the General promised his worn-out troops that the homeward march would commence as soon as possible.

Roberts had taken a specially active part in the expedition, as the General had been wounded in the arm, and on him had devolved the responsibility of taking the guns into action. Bourchier, in his despatch, said that he must "acknowledge in the warmest terms the services on this and every occasion of this distinguished officer. His untiring energy and sagacity," he wrote, "are beyond all praise; working without guides, without even map and geography. Thwarted by the Lushais, whose game was to delay our progress, he never seemed at a loss. Whether piloting the advance guard through the trackless forest, or solving a commissariat or transport difficulty, his powerful aid was willingly given."

This was the twenty-third time Roberts had been specially singled out for mention in despatches, a record of which any officer might well be proud, and one which qualified him for the day, now close at hand, when he himself was to send home despatches,

telling of the brilliant achievements carried through by those under his command.

As a special mark of distinction for his work in Lushai, he was made a C.B., and was promoted on the staff, his new post being that of Deputy-Quarter-master-General, both honours which, though well deserved, pleased him greatly, while he was more than thankful to get clear away from Lushai with all its unhealthiness, and back to the pure air of Simla. Lord Napier, too, was a Chief on whose staff Roberts found it a real pleasure to serve, not only because he was so thorough a soldier, conscientious, enthusiastic, and pre-eminently capable, but also because of the keen interest he took in his men, and the consistent manner in which he worked for their welfare. Nothing could have made a firmer bond of sympathy between the Chief and his staff officer than this trait, for throughout his whole career Roberts had felt the great value to a commanding officer of being able to hold the affections as well as the respect of his troops, and this he knew could only be achieved by understanding their needs, considering their comforts, and sparing no effort to promote their best interests.

"Napier spares himself no trouble," was the appreciative criticism of Roberts. "On the hottest days he would toil through barrack after barrack to satisfy himself that the soldiers were properly cared for. Europeans and natives were equally attended to, and many measures conducive to the men's comfort date from the time he was in command in India."

Another piece of promotion came to him at this time, for he was appointed Quartermaster-General, and so strongly was it felt that he was the one suitable man for the post, that special arrangements were made enabling him to fill it, as in the ordinary course of events he ought to have first held Major-General's rank. Another and a new experience, not purely military, came in his way, for he was sent to Behar to assist Sir Richard Temple in coping with all the horrors of the famine which existed there. A large quantity of rice was brought from Burma to Calcutta, but from there the grain had to be carried up to the famine district, and the streams, by which this could have been done, were dry and waterless. To meet the difficulty, Temple decided to hire thousands of waggons from the indigo planters whose trade was at a standstill, and desired the help of some really experienced transport officer in organising this work, as well as in arranging for transport trains. Roberts was only with him a short time, but the experience was a valuable one, and showed him another side of the difficulties which have constantly to be faced and averted by our Government in India. An immense sum of money was spent on this relief, but with this satisfactory result, that not a life was lost, thanks to the excellent way in which everything had been thought out and provided for; while the natives, grateful for what was done, learnt at least one of the advantages which British rule could bring them.

From that experience to his next was a wide jump, as the autumn of 1875 found Roberts at Delhi, arranging for the visit of the Prince of Wales, whose camp was pitched near the Ridge, so well known to many of the troops assembled there. Reviews, levées, parades, and balls now made the whole scene one of gaiety and brilliancy, and a sham fight for the possession of the Ridge recalled many a memory of the fights which had been fought out there in such grim earnest twenty years before. A few months later, and Delhi was once again the scene of a magnificent and historic spectacle, and Roberts, now an authority on the Eastern ceremonies, was responsible for the arrangements, his orders being that no trouble or expense were to be spared in making the occasion worthy of its great object, which was the proclamation of the Queen, as Empress of India.

Ever since the visit of the Prince of Wales, the native population had been awaiting some such announcement with anxious interest. The East India Company had been but a name, and so far, the British Government had meant nothing direct or personal. Something more was needed, and that was the link of a great name, not only to impress the native princes, but to give them a feeling that from henceforth they and their interests came under the sway of a living person, so that their future, with all its hopes and desires, lay bound up in the future of the British Crown.

Lord Lytton, the new Viceroy, understood the

native aristocracy, and saw how strongly they were swayed by sentiment, how great was their tendency to rally round a head, how highly they prized the slightest honours, and how deeply they were impressed by all outward symbols. He held, too, that in a sympathetic relationship between the Crown and the native aristocracy, lay the surest foundation-stone of our power in India, and the great object of his policy was to attach and secure these all-powerful rulers. To the assemblage at Delhi he therefore invited "all the princes, chiefs, and nobles, in whose persons the antiquity of the past is associated with the prosperity of the present, and who so worthily contribute to the splendour and stability of this great Empire," and a most enthusiastic response was made.

By the end of December they had all assembled, and a great welcome was given to the Viceroy, who, riding on an elephant gorgeously decked out, led a procession through the troop-lined streets, in which every window and house-top was thronged by wonder-struck natives. Lord Lytton had confessed to "seeming fussy and fractious about the decorative details, also about the sanitary and other arrangements, and the supply of food for so large a concourse of human beings, horses, camels, and elephants, all of which would require much care and forethought." But he need not have been anxious with Roberts on the spot, and almost one of the first remarks made by the Maharajah of Jeypore was one of genuine

wonder at the completeness of every arrangement.

Altogether nearly 70,000 human beings were met together at Delhi, and stayed there for fourteen days, some special ceremony being arranged for each day. One of the first and most important events lay in the presentation to each chief of a silken banner from the Queen, bearing on one side the Royal Arms, and on the other his own, while gold and silver medals were freely given to the lesser chiefs, who received them "radiant with pleasure and surprise, profuse in protestations of the most grateful and devoted loyalty." The actual proclamation was another and a most imposing ceremony, for grouped round the Viceroy sat the chiefs and the rulers with all the wonderful colouring of their costumes, and the blaze of their gold and jewels, and everywhere could be seen the bright and brilliant uniforms of the various troops. The massed bands played the National Anthem; *feux de joie* were fired; the Standard was hoisted, and then, after the proclamation had been read in two languages, the Viceroy read a personal message sent that day by telegraph by the Queen-Empress to her people. As he finished all rose to their feet and cheered, and when at last the enthusiasm died down somewhat, the Maharajah Sindiah stepped forward, and said fervently: "Monarch of monarchs, may God bless you! The Princes of India bless you, and pray that your sovereignty and power may remain steadfast for ever."

"O Mother, O Beloved, O residing in the Palace of London," spoke another. "The descendants of the Great Emperor of Delhi are burning in the fire of your anger. Surely to-day will angels sing your Majesty's glory in the heavenly regions where Yadhish Ra, the Son of Justice, who performed the great Najesaya festivals of Panderas three thousand years ago at Delhi, now resides."

On all hands the satisfaction was complete, and though there were not wanting in England those who considered that too lavish an extravagance had been allowed, all who were present and were in a position to gauge the impression left on the minds and in the hearts of the native princes, felt that the splendour had not been in vain, and that anything on a lesser scale would have failed to give the occasion the dignity and importance of which it was worthy.

Lord Lytton was quick to see in Roberts an officer who was not only a good soldier, but a good administrator too, a combination peculiarly valuable at that time, and under the special conditions then pressing on the British Government in India. On his way out, he had read a report made by General Roberts on the Afghanistan Question, which showed signs of becoming the question of the hour, and he had been immensely impressed with the clear, sensible views and the great military knowledge which it contained. After coming into personal contact with the Quartermaster-General, every good impression

was confirmed; the Viceroy formed the highest opinion of his powers, besides falling a victim to his many charms of character and manner, and he offered him the first important post which it lay in his hands to fill up. This was nothing less than the command of the Irregular Force stationed on the Punjab Frontier, with which position he hoped to associate that of Special Commissioner to the district. It was just such a post as Roberts had longed for, and every one agreed that he was the man for it, possessing as he did a love of these bold fighting frontier men, and an admiration of their many fine qualities, amounting in his case almost to an inherited instinct, while to these qualifications he added knowledge which he had gained through personal experience. The question of the Commissionership could not be settled at once, as it involved other changes, but Roberts started with his wife to take up his work as commandant as quickly as possible, both of them pleasurably looking forward to this new life with its many interests and possibilities. And thus for the first time Roberts had a free scope for the powers he so undoubtedly possessed, powers which long years of painstaking work had welded into a mighty weapon for action or defence.

CHAPTER IX

UP THE PEIWAR KOTAL

To follow the course of events and the endless negotiations which led up to a declaration of war between England and the Amir of Afghanistan, Sher Ali, in 1878, or to explain the many different policies which were urged, adopted, or rejected, would be to fill pages with facts which do not lie within the scope of this book, and therefore I will make only an endeavour to sketch out a very general view of the situation.

Afghanistan, lying as it does between the possessions of England and Russia in Asia, could hardly be otherwise than a bone of contention; gradually and steadily each of these two great powers had worked up from opposite directions nearer to its borders, and therefore nearer to each other, until now only 400 miles separated their outposts, where once 4000 miles had stood between them. Sher Ali was a clever and crafty ruler, and he saw that if he wished to keep his own independence, he must become the ally of one or the other of these Governments, so that he might rely on one for men, arms, and money, should the other desire to stretch out an arm and seize his possessions. The only puzzle

to his mind was as to which would be the safer, stronger ally to possess, England or Russia, and Sher Ali wavered between the two, just as they in their turn wavered in their policy regarding him.

His instincts for several reasons were on the side of England, but for many years he was not treated by the English Government in a way either to win his friendly confidence, or to command a wholesome respect. On the contrary, our policy towards him was vague, vacillating, and on more than one occasion distinctly vexatious. When he succeeded to his father, Dost Mahomed, he wrote a friendly letter to the Governor-General, Lord Elgin, asking that his succession might be acknowledged. To this no reply was sent, and Sher Ali was much offended at what he took to be an intentional slight; nor was a refusal on our part to give him any assistance against his brothers who revolted, calculated to make him feel at all confident in our friendly intentions. Still he persisted, and after having defeated his brothers he wrote again to the Viceroy, who was then Sir John Lawrence. From England, Lawrence had been given leave to "pursue his own policy," which was resolutely to refrain from taking one side or another in any of the quarrels between the Amir and his own people, but to promise help against enemies from without, to whoever should come out conqueror. Sher Ali being victorious, and now the acknowledged ruler, by right of his own victories, as well as by right

of having been appointed heir by his father, Lawrence wrote him a letter of congratulation, begging him to be just and merciful to his enemies, sending him £60,000 and several thousand muskets, and assuring him that the British Government, anxious to cement the friendship and alliance which they desired, looked for no other return on the part of Sher Ali than his abiding confidence, sincerity, and goodwill. His successor, Lord Mayo, adopted the same tone, met the Amir at Umballa, received him with so much splendour that at last Sher Ali began to feel himself a king, and further presented him with a beautiful jewelled sword, which he vehemently declared should only be drawn in defence of the British Government. The conference which followed was, on the whole, satisfactory to the Amir, though he did not obtain all he asked for; and he went home feeling that he had much to gain and little to fear from England. He had pledged himself to do all in his power to maintain peace on our frontier, to comply with our wishes on matters of trade, and to devote himself to the peace and well-being of his dominions; while Lord Mayo, though he had refused to grant him a fixed money allowance, or to promise him British troops to deal with his own rebels, had yet promised him all possible moral support—money, arms, ammunition, and native workmen—and had assured him that any suggestions he might make would be treated with consideration and respect. Two points

which seemed trivial at the time must, however, be borne in mind as assuming importance later on. Lord Mayo proposed that a British officer should reside at Kabul, and this was so warmly opposed by Sher Ali, for various reasons, that the suggestion was dropped, while on the other side, a request from the Amir, that the Viceroy should appoint a committee to arbitrate between him and Russia as to a boundary question, was readily agreed to. But all this while Russia was not inactive; and steadily she pushed forward, subduing by stern force of strength those tribes who had for so long withstood her advance. True, this advance was cleverly explained to Lord Granville, the Foreign Secretary, by Prince Gortschakoff, and he was assured that now a frontier had been reached, Russia had neither the desire to overstep it, nor any object in so doing; but these soothing speeches concealed the true facts of the case, and Sher Ali was genuinely alarmed. Not so the Government, who declared themselves to be quite satisfied with the assurance given by the Czar, that Afghanistan was to be regarded as completely outside the sphere of Russian influence; and successive Viceroys had actually to persuade the suspicious Amir into answering in a friendly manner the courteous messages which came to him from the Russian Government. Nevertheless the Amir was so charmed by Lord Mayo, and so much gratified at the result of his visit to him, that he adopted and made his officers adopt clothes of English style;

Watts *Fred. Hollyer*

THE EARL OF LYTTON, VICEROY OF INDIA

ordered the shoemakers of Kabul to deal only in shoes of English pattern; and better still, he set himself to rule in such a way as should meet the Viceroy's approval.

But after awhile Sher Ali again became dissatisfied and irritated. The result of the Commission he had asked for did not please him, and he sent an envoy to meet the new Viceroy at Simla, that he might find out "the real views of the British Government on all these matters." Lord Northbrook had nothing fresh to say, nor could the envoy obtain any further promises of assistance from him, so that he went away having accomplished but little, and Sher Ali, hasty and passionate, made no attempt to conceal his disappointment. Rightly or wrongly, he felt aggrieved at the "do nothing" policy, and believed that to keep peace with Russia, the British Government would give in to anything which did not affect themselves, or injure their position, and that he could no longer look on England as a staunch and firm ally.

One event after another served to strengthen his distrust, and it cannot be denied that he was more than once unnecessarily irritated, and handled in a way hardly likely to win or to retain his confidence; the fact of the matter being that there were considerable differences of opinion both in the Cabinet at home and the Government in India as to the line of action to be taken. On Lord Lytton becoming Viceroy, however, a new and a clear policy was laid down, which showed that the Cabinet had awakened

to the fact that the Amir was full of schemes to play off Russia against England, and that the British position in Afghanistan was one of great weakness and uncertainty. Lord Lytton was ordered to send a friendly mission to Kabul or any other place the Amir might prefer, to confer with him and show him that the British Government, while having nothing but the friendliest feelings for him, and the desire to preserve his independence, had no idea of sitting still while Russia was "apologising, but continuing to move forward." If Sher Ali refused to receive the mission it would be obvious that he was no longer friendly; if, on the other hand, all went satisfactorily, the Viceroy was authorised to give several assurances and pledges likely to meet the Amir's wishes.

Lord Lytton realised the position and the hold which Russia had already obtained. His own opinion therefore was very decided.

"The Amir must choose," he said, "which of his two powerful neighbours he will rely upon, and he must learn that if he does not promptly prove himself our loyal friend, we shall be obliged to regard him as our enemy and treat him accordingly. A tool in the hands of Russia I will never allow him to become. Such a tool it would be my duty to break before it could be used."

Sher Ali took some time in answering the Viceroy's letter; when he did so it was in a vague way, and practically a refusal to receive the mission,

as he said that if anything fresh had arisen on which a discussion were necessary, he preferred to send a confidential agent of his own to the Viceroy.

"In fact," wrote Lord Lytton to Lord Salisbury, "the Amir is satisfied, first, that there is nothing to be got out of us; secondly, that there is not much to be feared from us. He is also under the impression that if we are not positively pledged to passivity by some understanding with Russia, we are at least mortally afraid of coming in collision with her by actively supporting him. He argues that if we are obliged to propitiate Russia, he must do so too, and as he believes us to be the most scrupulous and least offensive of his two awkward customers, it is England that he is least afraid of offending."

A second letter was sent to Sher Ali, explanatory and conciliatory in tone, and giving him every opportunity of reconsidering his decision. To this no answer was vouchsafed for a long while; then came the news that the Amir was receiving an envoy from Russia with the utmost cordiality. His second answer, when it arrived, differed but little from the first, except that he asked that the British native agent at Kabul, who knew all his opinions and wishes, should be summoned to repeat the same to the Viceroy, and then return to Kabul to carry any message it might be desired to send. This was agreed to, as Lord Lytton was most anxious to avoid that open breach which must inevitably end in war, and held that "reckless action was not the only alternative to reckless

inactivity." But he knew that the crisis had been reached, and that our present position with regard to the Amir was untenable. We were bound to help him against Russia if he asked for help, yet we could not count on him for assistance should we desire it. He could make what terms he liked with Russia; we could not even send a mission to confer with him, save with his consent. It was all the result of an indefinite policy in the past, or rather the fatal policy of drifting and letting well alone, so long as all appeared well on the surface.

"Nobody can recognise more seriously than I do that there is considerable risk in whatever we do, as well as in whatever we do not do," he wrote in a minute. "But it is a risk bequeathed to us by the inexorable Nemesis of neglected opportunities. Fortune is a fair player, and never checkmates a man or a nation without first crying check; but we have greatly increased the difficulty of our game by not moving our pieces when there was still time to cover the king."

The native agent went back to the Amir, having obtained from the Viceroy considerable concessions, the most important new points being, that the British Government would recognise the son he chose as his heir, and would allow to the Amir himself a yearly subsidy, while all the old points held good. But on his side the Amir would be expected to pledge himself not to hold communications with Russia or other powers without our knowledge; to receive special

missions from us when requested; and to consent that British agents should reside at Herat, or somewhere suitable on the frontier.

For several months no answer came. It was evident that the Amir, who read translated copies of the English newspapers, believed England to be on the verge of a war with Russia, over Turkey, and his plan was to wait as long as possible before deciding on which side it would be most advantageous for him to throw in his lot. Eventually he agreed to send two of his ministers to meet the Viceroy's envoy at Peshawur, and professed to accept broadly the condition, that British officers should reside on his frontier. Sir Lewis Pelly was the envoy chosen, but it soon became obvious that Sher Ali's minister had no idea of really agreeing to this point, for he declared that he could not accept it as the basis of any agreement which might be come to. Nogotiations were therefore suspended for the moment, while both envoys consulted their respective Governments. Lord Lytton instructed Sir Lewis Pelly to make it clear to the Amir, that though the old treaties still remained binding and would be honestly adhered to on the old understanding, the new concessions offered to him would stand or fall by his consent to the presence of our officers on the frontier, the purpose of which he now pretended to misunderstand; and at the same time the Viceroy added his private opinion to his envoy that the conference should be closed, and that, so far from its

having been in vain, it had torn aside the veil, shown quite unmistakably the real aims and feelings of the Amir, and made it evident that the British Government had no influence at Kabul.

But before any further instructions could be received from Sher Ali, his chief envoy, Noor Mahomed, died, and so the conference came abruptly to an end. The Amir flew into a rage; the last opportunity for settlement had gone, he declared, and there was nothing for it but war, a contingency for which he had been quietly but steadily preparing, by inciting his people against the British Government, and by pushing on rapidly the fortifications and the manufacture of guns and ammunition at Kabul. Then came the arrival of the Russian envoy, and though at first the Amir had pretended to be alarmed at the object of his visit, he received him warmly and with all the honours due to the representative of a great power. Undoubtedly Russia had but one policy now, that of intriguing against England in Afghanistan and harassing her in India, to weaken her position at the moment in Europe, and General Stolietoff had been sent to Kabul to carry this out. The tone of Russian influence can be best understood by such a letter as the following, written by Stolietoff himself, which was taken at Kabul, together with many other treaties and papers.

"I inform you, my kind friend, that the enemy of your famous region (England) wants to make peace with you through the Sultan of Turkey, there-

fore you should look to your brothers who live on the other side of the river (Russia). If God stirs them up and gives the sword of fight into their hands, then go on in the name of God; otherwise you should be as a serpent. *Make peace openly, and in secret prepare for war.* It will be well when the envoy of your enemy wants to enter the country, if you send an able emissary, possessing the tongue of a serpent and full of deceit, to the enemy's country, so that he may with sweet words perplex the enemy's mind and induce him to give up the intention of fighting with you."

But by the time the Generals reached Kabul the Berlin Treaty had been signed and the likelihood of a war between Russia and England in Europe had been staved off, and this so far altered the complexion of affairs that Stolietoff received orders "not to go generally as far as would have been advisable, if war with England had been threatened."

Lord Lytton, on hearing of the reception granted by the Amir to the Russian envoy, wrote home to ask if he was to move in this matter, or whether it would become an Imperial question. If action were left to the Indian Government, it was his intention to insist on a British envoy being received at Kabul in the same way as had been the Russian, and Neville Chamberlain, as being able, resolute, of great experience in frontier affairs, and personally known to most of the Afghan nobles, was the man he should hope to induce to undertake the mission. This proposal of Lord Lytton's was agreed to cordially by

telegraph; Chamberlain accepted the position, and then the Amir was communicated with. He at once showed the Viceroy's letter to the Russian, and asked his advice as to how he should answer it.

Stolietoff, without openly inciting him to give a direct refusal, intimated that with the present strained relations between England and Russia the presence of their two envoys in Kabul at the same time would create many difficulties, adding pointedly, "Two swords cannot go into one scabbard"; and on this Sher Ali decided not to allow the British Mission to enter his dominions. But he did not make his decision known, and the death of his son at this moment gave him an excellent excuse for still further delay, as he explained that he was too stricken with grief to attend to business, and no answer could be given till after the month of mourning. There was, of course, some truth in these words, for he was really in great distress of mind; still it seemed evident that his private sorrows did not interrupt the negotiations which were being carried on with Stolietoff. A second communication was then made, in which Sher Ali was plainly told that the mission was about to start, that its object was perfectly friendly, and that any attempt to stop it would be taken as a sign of open hostility.

On Sir Neville Chamberlain's arrival at Jamrud, near the Kyber Pass, however, it was clear that the mission was not to be allowed to pass. Major Cavagnari, a famous frontier officer, rode forward to Faiz

Mahomed, the Afghan commander, to hear what were his orders. There was no evasiveness in his answer. He was to act as sentry, and to oppose the entrance of the mission as forcibly and effectively as possible, and on these points he could not be moved. To have gone on would have meant certain death, and the mission had no option but to withdraw. "Nothing could have been more distinct, nothing more humiliating to the British Crown and nation," wrote Chamberlain to the Viceroy. And after this repulse the Government had but one course open.

"Sahib," said some of the native notables in Peshawur to Chamberlain, whom they knew intimately and trusted, "the people say, and we think, that you will still do nothing!"

But the days of masterly inactivity were over, and preparations for action were promptly put in hand. Two columns were ordered to mobilise, one with the object of advancing, if and when necessary, towards Kandahar, the other to work in the Kuram Valley; and to Lord Lytton's credit must it ever be remembered that it was he who nominated Roberts to the command of this Kuram column, despite the criticisms and opposition of a strong minority, who considered him too young and inexperienced a general for such an important post. Lord Lytton, moreover, saw to it that his force, small as it was in number, was not handicapped by want of proper equipment.

The Kandahar column was given to General Donald Stewart, and a third column, arranged for as an

afterthought, was commanded by Sir Samuel Brown, another great friend of Roberts. Still the Government at home hesitated to strike the first blow even at this eleventh hour, and a final ultimatum was sent to Sher Ali, in which he was told that unless a favourable reply was received by the 20th of November, he would be held as an enemy to England and be treated accordingly. No answer came, and the forces on the frontier were put in motion.

On both sides there had been a great lack of vigour, and a veiling of the real issues, throughout all these weary years of negotiations, and the policy of Lord Lytton has been fiercely assailed as having been persistently irritating and lacking in the straightforwardness which might so easily have won the complete confidence of the Amir. But Sher Ali, with his crafty eastern mind, was too fond of intrigue for any simple or straightforward policy to influence him for long, and he lived under conditions in which he could coquette first with one power and then with the other, as seemed advantageous to himself. It was all essential that he should be forced to show his hand, and it is extremely doubtful if anything short of an appeal to arms would have answered the purpose, while in the eyes of the natives, concessions at that period would have appeared as nothing less than an acknowledgment of helpless weakness, and would have had a very far-reaching and bad effect. At the same time, it is certain that Lord Lytton underestimated the

difficulties of the campaign and the fighting powers of the Afghans. He was visionary, over sanguine, carried away by the greatness of his own ideas; he listened impatiently to the opinions of the Commander-in-Chief and other old Indian soldiers, and it was with difficulty that he was shaken in his belief that the mere presence of a British force on the frontier, would have the necessary effect on the Afghans.

Roberts arrived at Kohot on the 9th of October to take over his command, and at once began a most minute and searching inspection of his force, determined that any weak points in it should be strengthened now while there was the time and the opportunity. He was not the man to take anything for granted, or to rest satisfied with a superficial glance. Everything concerning the troops themselves, their equipment and clothing, their transport arrangements, supplies, and hospitals, came under his personal searching scrutiny, and he did not hesitate to report at once fully and freely to the headquarters at Simla on the deficiencies he found. The number of troops at his disposal he considered insufficient for the carrying out of the orders entrusted to him, which were that he should occupy the Kuram Valley, drive out the Afghan garrisons south of the Shutargardan Pass, push on into the Khost Valley, and beyond that if necessary. His own personal popularity, and the warm backing up which any suggestion he made received from the

Viceroy, ended in his obtaining more men and better transport after very short delay, though the latter still left much to be desired; for in spite of one experience after another, which had proved how seriously hampered any force must be by insufficient transport, but little had been done towards remedying this matter, while the useful mountain guns were few in number, and the hospitals were not properly fitted up.

But Roberts did not content himself with asking for help from Simla; he knew how to help himself and how to balance against each other his weakness and his strength. He appreciated, too, the difference between a false and a true economy, and though he cut down all unnecessary baggage, he did not stint his men in blankets or food. His supplies had all to be brought up from Rawal Pindi, which was over a hundred miles from Kohot, and Thal—the frontier station, which was to be the advanced depôt—was at a distance of sixty-three miles, leaving quite two hundred miles of very bad roads, many of them running through the lands of uncertain tribes, all of which had to be guarded, out of a force which numbered about five thousand men. After six weeks of steady work by Roberts, during which, in the words of one who has on occasions criticised him severely, he had shown "energy, clear-headedness, and practical knowledge of which it is impossible to speak too highly," the force was ready to start; and on November 21st it left Thal and crossed the frontier without opposition. "A very matter-of-fact affair,

just like crossing a street," remarked a young officer undergoing his first experience of active service.

The Kuram Valley through which the march was made, lay for about sixty miles between mountains, and the road, which ran more or less along the river bed, was of the roughest, intersected every few hundred yards by watercourses and ravines, or almost blockaded with thick patches of canebrake or tall grasses. Then there were times when the river had to be forded, though its waters were icy cold, and the nights bitter. Progress could only be slow and wearisome, and after five long days of marching less than fifty miles had been covered. News as to the whereabouts of the enemy was vague and unsatisfactory, for the natives brought in reports so entirely contradictory that Roberts saw no reliance could be placed in them. He therefore sent out his own reconnoitring parties, with the result that he soon found the enemy, who, far from having broken up and fled, as had been reported, had taken up a very strong position on the Peiwar Kotal, a steep mountain. He discovered, too, that they had there 18,000 men and several guns, and that commanding as they did the road to Kabul, they must be driven from that position before anything in the shape of a further advance could be made. A frontal attack was out of the question, as the pass up the mountain was steep and narrow, besides being open to a heavy fire from the enemy. The loss of life would have been

great even had the position been carried, and Roberts, never lacking in dash, or in readiness to take risks, has never thrown away lives recklessly.

In a flank march and in a series of sudden and unexpected blows lay his chance, but not a man in the force realised more fully than its general the magnitude of the task which awaited them, and in after days he confessed "to a feeling very nearly akin to despair," as he gazed at the apparently impregnable mountain towering above, occupied by crowds of soldiers and many guns. During two days he rested his troops, but for him there could not be a moment's rest. A blow had to be struck, and struck quickly, with a force far too small. His duty now lay in finding out at which point that blow could be dealt most effectually and with the least loss of life. A further reconnaissance decided him against an attack on the left and in favour of one on the right, but the whole success of such a move lay in its being unexpected. Roberts knew all too well that in his force were many spies, camel drivers and the like, who would manage to get information through to the enemy. It was all important therefore to deceive them into believing that his plan lay in a frontal attack, and this he succeeded in doing, by going several times each day with his staff, and a large escort, to the points from which a frontal attack would naturally be undertaken.

No one beyond his two senior staff officers and his A.D.C. knew of the real move, until on Sunday

evening, the 1st of December, Roberts summoned all the commanding officers to his tent, told them of his scheme, and ordered the start to be made in the darkness in two or three hours. Up to the last moment the utmost secrecy was maintained. The troops were formed up in silence, and the camp fires were made to burn brightly, so as to give the impression that all was as usual.

The night was dark; the cold was intense; nor could the column move quickly, as it was all essential that the troops should keep close together. But on they pressed towards Spingawi, the point which would give them command over the right of the Peiwar Kotal, for at all costs the attack must be made in the early dawn. Suddenly there rang out two shots in the silence, and there was a low murmur of "Treachery"! The darkness made discovery impossible, though suspicion fell on some of the Pathans in the Punjab Infantry, the regiment which had been given the post of honour, and they were sent to the rear. But their plan to warn the enemy had nearly been successful, for the shots had been heard by the Afghan sentry, who woke up the commander of the post, and he, luckily for Roberts, hearing nothing more, decided that there was no cause for alarm.

It was six in the morning and still dark when the enemy's outposts were reached. Then came a challenge, two shots, a steady fire from the mountain guns, a determined rush up the slopes at the point of

the bayonet by the plucky little Goorkhas and the Highlanders, and the summit of the Spingawi hill was occupied, Roberts himself being on the spot with the advance party. Much was gained, but not all, for the main body of the Afghans still lay untouched and strongly defended on the Peiwar Kotal, and those of the enemy who had been driven from the Spingawi hilltop, had taken up another good position in the thick pine woods, which barred the way to this chief object of attack. By now it was full morning, the air keen and fresh, but the sun shining brightly, and Roberts was determined to lose no time in pushing on, as it was imperative to follow up the early success before the Afghans had a chance to recover their morning's surprise. Besides, he was now in signalling communication with General Cobbe, whom he had left behind with a thousand troops in the camp, and whom he had ordered to harass the enemy by a pretence at a frontal attack, while he fell on their flank. So with his trusty Highlanders and Goorkhas, the Punjab Infantry and some Artillery, Roberts restarted, and the column slowly made its way up through woods, where every step meant climbing or crawling among the stems of fallen trees, or over rocks and boulders innumerable; and all the while the Afghans kept up a steady fire from behind the trees where they were hidden, every now and then charging down their side of the hill, though always to be again driven back. At last a hollow was reached, and here our troops were in a warm corner,

for the enemy, safely protected on the far side by a breastwork of fallen trees, opened a sharp fire. Roberts saw that this was the moment for a vigorous attack, but to his horror he found that only the Punjab Infantry, on whom he could place but little reliance, had come up, the rest of the column having apparently taken a wrong turn and lost themselves in the forest. Every five minutes' delay was disastrous, but to move without the missing troops looked hopeless.

Roberts sent off one A.D.C. after another in search of them, and himself addressed the native regiment, to see what their loyalty was worth at this crisis. The Sikhs readily responded, but they alone could do nothing, and the Pathans kept up a sulky silence. Meanwhile the Afghans were gaining confidence, and were evidently preparing to rush down on the spot where stood Roberts practically unprotected save for the half-hearted Punjab Infantry. Probably never, in the whole course of his fighting career, has he lived through a more critical moment. But a ray of light broke in upon the scene, when Mr. Adams, the chaplain, who had insisted on being used as a staff officer for the occasion that he might go in pursuit of the lost troops, galloped up with the welcome news that at last he had found them, and that they, with some native infantry and mountain guns, were close at hand. Still a plucky attempt at a direct attack failed, and Roberts resolved to try another flank movement, certain that a way round the hill could be

found. On the right lay his last chance, and by another stroke of good luck, some of General Cobbe's troops who had worked their way up the mountain side, joined him, Colonel Perkins, one of the number, bringing the valuable piece of information that, close by, he had found a spot from which the Kotal could be fired on at a telling distance. Thither the mountain guns were moved, and Roberts set out to march upon the rear of the Kotal. The guns came into action at once, and though at first the shells falling among the baggage animals and right into the camp itself did not seriously disconcert the Afghans, the continuous fire, which at last set alight the tents, alarmed them. A panic set in; and as soon as they realised the attack which was being directed against their rear, they broke up, evacuated their position and fled, chased by Colonel Hugh Gough and his cavalry. On the first signs of their certain withdrawal Colonel Drew, who was in command of Cobbe's Brigade, ordered his troops to advance, and himself leading the way, they soon stood unopposed on the crest of the hill, stiff climb as it was, and weary as were the men after the many hours they had been on their feet.

"A strange sight met our eyes," wrote a lieutenant in the 8th King's Regiment, who with his men formed part of Drew's Brigade. "There, on the saddle of the hill over which the road leads, were the brass field pieces to which the enemy had clung so desperately, all dulled with smoke and dirt. A little farther

back stood the tents, and piled round them were munitions of war and every conceivable article of camp equipage in the wildest confusion. There had been some attempt at packing up and loading at the last moment before the flight, but the men soon dragged everything forth to view. Amongst piles of sheepskin, great-coats, boxes of ammunition, powder and shot loose in bags, sacks of grain, blankets and rugs, you would come across a bundle of despatches, a copy of the Koran, and an embroidered scarf. As the night closed in, we lit large fires with the pine-trees felled by our unwilling hosts, and were preparing to bivouac as best we might in the biting cold, when our indefatigable quartermaster appeared with our baggage and we fared better than our neighbours."

Roberts, with his force, who were also worn-out after having been hard on the move for twenty hours with only scanty rations, did not make for the top of the Kotal that evening, but bivouacked some way lower down; and in spite of having no overcoat or tent, and there being twenty degrees of frost, he admits to having rarely slept more soundly or contentedly! Early next morning, however, he stood on the mountain top of his desire, and knew that one great vantage ground had been won. A closer view of the position only served to show its natural strength, and Roberts had good reason to be proud of this, his first great achievement. At every point the advantage had lain with the enemy. They knew their ground,

had plenty of provisions and ammunition, were strong in numbers, well protected from our fire, and moreover were brave fighting men, bravely led, and yet they had been routed with very little loss.

In an order issued to his troops that morning their General wrote:—

"The result is most honourable, and could only have been achieved by troops in a high state of discipline, capable of enduring hardships, and able to fight as soldiers of the British Army have always fought." The men, on their side, were not slow in doing justice to Roberts, who had "used his little army like a finely-tempered sword"; had inspired all under his command with supreme confidence in his judgment as a skilful general, as well as in his boldness as an intrepid leader; and who had shown such a happy combination of prudence and audacity. To this must be added the fact that Roberts then, as in many another critical moment since, had good luck on his side, the best ally for any general to possess. On two or three occasions during the taking of the Peiwar Kotal the issue hung in a balance, and a feather's weight on the wrong side would have meant disaster. Nor was Roberts ever blind to the true facts of the case; he had far too good a grasp of them for that. But having carefully made all his plans, he kept a cool head and a strong heart through the varying fortunes of war, knowing when to alter a detail and when to

hold fast to a main object, when to dare and when to stay his hand; and so he was able "to plunge into the darkness with a handful of troops, and to turn a numerous enemy from one of the strongest positions which an enemy has ever occupied."

CHAPTER X

TREATIES AND TREACHERY

GENERAL ROBERTS decided at once not to pursue the enemy, who had fled over the Shutargardan Pass, but to remain stationary until his tents and supplies arrived, and then to reconnoitre the country before him, so as to find out what other roads or ways could be used as lines of communication if necessary. The tribes near at hand appeared to be friendly. They brought food to our troops with words of welcome, and professed to be duly impressed by their feat on the Peiwar Kotal; but though they were seemingly anxious to be on the winning side, Roberts did not feel inclined to place too much confidence in their protestations, and kept an eye open to behold the first signs of treachery. He made his headquarters at Ali Khel, and having there found out that the road on the Kuram side of the Shutargardan Pass was clear of the enemy, he made a reconnaissance, so as to get some idea of the way over which troops marching to Kabul would eventually have to go. A second reconnaissance in another direction gave him a taste of the treachery which lay all around him, for, having to lead his tiny force through a narrow pass, the sides of which it was

impossible to properly protect, he found that one tribe meditated an attack, and that another, which had so far been most friendly, had flooded the single file, knowing well that it would at once become frozen and slippery, and make anything like a quick progress through this dangerous pass impossible.

On the mountains overlooking the pass were to be seen a few harmless-looking men, apparently shepherds, who took no notice of the troops, all of whom, with the exception of some Goorkhas, pushed on ahead of the baggage. But the sight of the baggage, which at once suggested loot, was too great a temptation to the men on the mountains, and they began to gather together, finally closing in on the rear of the column, until they were within fifty yards of the convoy. Then some of the leading Mangals began making signs and low bows, all in the friendliest manner, and Captain Goad, the transport officer, refused to suspect them of treachery. Suddenly a volley was fired at his party, and he was the first to fall, dangerously wounded. With him there were only four men, Sergeant Greer and three privates of the Seaforth Highlanders, but they picked him up, carried him to a safe place, and then facing the enemy, set themselves to a stiff fight, determined at all costs to protect their wounded officer, and hold the Mangals at bay. Thanks to their cool heads and their steady aim, they held on till help arrived, and Roberts, when he heard of their heroic stand, recommended

the sergeant for a commission, which he obtained much to the gratification of the whole force.

Meanwhile the rear-guard had been attacked, and had also driven off the enemy, the plucky little Goorkhas being justly proud of the fact that not one of their camels was killed, or one piece of their baggage lost, though their casualties amounted to three men killed and thirteen wounded. General Roberts issued an order expressing his appreciation of their behaviour; but a few days later he had a very different and unpleasant duty to carry out regarding some other native soldiers—those men in the Punjab Infantry who had fired the warning shot at the attack on the Peiwar Kotal, and those who had since deserted. They had all been found guilty by the court of inquiry, and Roberts, "with deep regret," confirmed the sentences, which varied from death sentences to imprisonment, feeling that such gross treachery, which might easily have involved their regiment as well as the whole force in disaster, deserved heavy punishment.

His next work was to explore the Khost country, and as part of his force had to be left to hold the Peiwar Kotal through the winter months till the advance on Kabul could be made, he had very few men at his disposal, and the same old story of insufficient transport again prevented his doing all he desired. On Christmas Eve came the news that Sher Ali, deserted by most of his army, had released his son, Yakub Khan, the "ill-starred wretch" as he

contemptuously called him, from the prison into which he had thrown him, and leaving him to bear the brunt of the present situation, had himself left for St. Petersburg with three Russian officers, his last message to the British Government being to the effect that he had gone to lay the whole case before the Czar, who considered him as a brother.

Lord Lytton was anxious if possible to end the war, provided such conditions were accepted as would make the recurrence of it impossible, but for the moment there was no Afghan Government with which to treat, and Yakub Khan was an unknown quantity. A preliminary message was sent, assuring him through Major Cavagnari, that the Government had no quarrel with him personally, but was quite ready to return to friendly relations, and this reached him about the same time as the news of his father's death. For Sher Ali having been attacked with mortification in the leg, had firmly refused to have it amputated, saying he was ready to submit to the will of God, but as a prince he could never submit to the knife of a surgeon, and so he had died at Turkestan, declaring that the Russians were powerless to help him, and were mere schoolboys beside the English.

Negotiations for peace were in the air, but Roberts went steadily on with his plan in the Khost Valley, despite the many dangers of it. For so small was his force that they were unable to inspire anything like terror into the hearts of the tribesmen, whose

sheer love of fighting egged them on continually to attack the little body of troops which they declared had been delivered into their hands. On one occasion, for example, the acting governor came out to meet General Roberts, and promised to make over to him the fort of Matun, if he might be allowed to go in safety to India or Kabul. The only troops in the fort were local militiamen, but he assured the General that there was nothing to fear from the people of the district, who were all well disposed towards the British. So on the 6th of January Roberts with his troops marched into the fort, to a lively salute from the tom toms of the militiamen, and was with his staff entertained at tea by the acting governor. In the midst of his hospitalities, however, he broke the pleasing news that the inhabitants of the valley, incited thereto by the numbers of tribesmen who had collected together, intended attacking the British camp that night, and that he was powerless to prevent them.

Roberts accordingly prepared to await them, but the night passed off uneventfully, and the cavalry patrols he had sent out reported that no body of an enemy's force could be traced anywhere, only a "peaceful husbandman here and there." A warning sent round to the villages threatening severe punishment to any one who harboured the Mangals, brought in numbers of the Meers, who swore that all the Mangals had returned to their homes. But in the morning the whole district round was studded with

dark groups of the tribesmen, who had assembled in their thousands, round all three sides of the camp. Roberts judged that only prompt and vigorous action could ensure the safety of his force, which was completely outnumbered and separated by many miles of difficult country from any reinforcements, and once more trusting to the superior power of disciplined troops, however few, over untrained natives, he ordered a series of cavalry charges which drove the enemy to the highest ridges, from whence they quickly retreated when the artillery began to shell them there. To make their defeat more thorough, the villages near at hand, which had given them shelter, were burned, a punishment evidently quite expected by the inhabitants, who had deserted them wholesale.

The next night did not pass without excitement, though of a different character. Just after dark, a shot, followed by several others, was heard in the camp; the alarm was given, in five minutes the troops were formed up, and every one stood in readiness for a night attack. But nothing more happened, and it was some little time before the meaning of the shots was known. Then the alarm proved to be due to the fact that a few of the enemy had been found to be creeping up the banks of the nullah at the back of the camp, where some Waziri prisoners, as yet unransomed, were being kept under guard, their plan evidently being to set free their comrades. The guard, of course, fired on them, as did the

sentries round; in the confusion of the moment the prisoners made a frantic effort to escape, and the native officer in charge of them, having first warned them, fired on them, as he was in duty bound to do. Six were killed and thirteen wounded, and at the court of inquiry held next day the native officer and the guard were found to be in no way to blame for this unfortunate occurrence.

But as so often happens, a wildly exaggerated account of it all reached England, and was hailed with delight by that small but talkative class of individuals who are always ready to accept, on any or on no evidence, stories which profess to set forth the brutalities perpetrated by British officers and men. The tale of the "slaughtered prisoners" was eloquently enlarged upon, till it was even solemnly stated in the House of Commons that "ninety prisoners who had been taken, had been tied together with ropes, and that on making some attempt to escape had been slaughtered in their bonds," while Roberts himself, most humane and tender-hearted of soldiers, was attacked in an unscrupulous way for "preferring to have his prisoners butchered instead of taking proper steps to keep them in safety." The common-sense of the English nation as a whole refused to believe statements so wildly improbable, but the incident is a good illustration of the ready manner in which a certain class of people are always willing to believe the worst of the

men who are fighting our battles, and who are not on the spot to defend themselves.

General Roberts lost no time in sending for all the headmen of Matun, and in telling them that they had only themselves to thank for the present state of things, as he was most anxious to avoid any bloodshed, and they need have nothing to fear from him or his troops, so long as they behaved in a friendly manner. But though the headmen were, as usual, full of friendly protestations, Roberts felt his force was too small to be left at their mercy, nor was it possible for him with his limited numbers to do more than give a few salutary lessons to the combative tribesmen who had collected in the Khost Valley; so at the end of January 1879 he returned to the Kuram Valley, and there received a visit from Sirdar Wali Mahomed Khan, the brother of Sher Ali, who said he had escaped from Kabul with many important followers, fearing the anger of Yakub Khan, and was anxious to make terms to secure at any rate his own safety. Roberts entertained him cordially, but passed him on to Major Cavagnari, who was treating with the Afghan Government; and then the indefatigable general, whose wonderful and unceasing activity astonished every officer and man with the force, set to work to widen and improve the roads, to build huts for his troops, and to minimise in any way that he could for them, the hardships of this winter campaign. Yakub Khan was negotiating but slowly, so Roberts went on with his work of pre-

paration, and was always willing to meet in the most friendly and conciliatory spirit any of the tribesmen who were genuine in their desire to become allies. In many cases he trusted entirely to their good faith, for he would attend gatherings of their chiefs with a tiny escort of Goorkhas, who could have been no real protection had some fanatics suddenly attacked him. And apparently in their eyes he bore a charmed life, for they never betrayed this bold appeal to their honour. An unexpected worry met him just at this time, caused by a war correspondent from England, who not only wrote home alarming and incorrect articles, but committed the still more unpardonable offence of adding to telegrams after they had been passed by the General. Roberts, as is well known, trusts every man till he finds him to be untrustworthy, then he shows how strong and uncompromising he can be. The correspondent was promptly dismissed, and though, of course, there were those in England who criticised his action, he was warmly supported by the Viceroy. Few generals are more invariably kind and considerate to war correspondents than Roberts, and the lines he lays down for them are simply those of commonsense and humanity. He demands that they shall be accurate; that if they criticise they shall at least acquaint themselves with facts, and not accept wild stories on any authority; that they shall not send home sensational and harrowing articles which cause much needless pain and anxiety, and can serve no

useful purpose; and that they shall loyally agree to such restrictions as it may be now and again necessary to enforce. In return he gives them every help, and it is safe to say that the happiest relations exist between him and the correspondents, whom he is the first to include among his comrades-at-arms.

But his action in this particular instance was characteristic.

In February the contingent of over 3000 men raised by the Punjab chiefs arrived as reinforcements, and were invaluable at this moment to Roberts. They were followed by the Gordon Highlanders, as it was arranged that the march on Kabul should commence in March, unless by that time Yakub Khan had consented to satisfactory terms. Like his father, he was vacillating.

First, he had written begging that the friendship of the illustrious British Government might remain constant to the God-granted state of Afghanistan, to which Lord Lytton had replied, laying down all the old conditions, with some new ones. The Amir accepted the condition that a British Resident should be placed at Kabul, on condition that he did not interfere in Afghan affairs, but he demurred to the other proposals, chiefly to one which required him to give up to British control the country between Thal and Shutargardan. Major Cavagnari suggested that if a meeting could be arranged these matters of difference might be talked out, and Yakub Khan

invited him to come to Kabul, "that the real concord on both sides might be declared and proved face to face."

So far all this sounded eminently satisfactory, but two important facts were lost sight of. Successful as had been Roberts's campaign so far as it went, he had not as yet had the opportunity of defeating the Afghans in a sufficiently decisive way to give them a wholesome fear of English troops. The matter at issue still had to be fought out if any lasting peace was to be the result, for the Afghans were a confident and conceited people, and quite ready to believe they could win the upper hand in any prolonged campaign. And on the other hand, Yakub Khan was far too weak and helpless an individual to hold his people to any treaty which might be made, even should he wish to do so.

Roberts strongly urged that the time had not yet come to make peace, and that any attempt to do so would prove a failure in the long run. But in England people were clamouring for the war to end. Public opinion pressed the home Government, which in its turn pressed the Viceroy, and so negotiations were still proceeded with in spite of the fact that some letters of the Amir which were intercepted showed that he was at that moment trying to stir up a war against us, describing us as "the infidels whom God has destroyed, who will all go to hell, and who therefore should all be quickly destroyed."

Suddenly Yakub changed his mind, and sent a

messenger to say that he wished himself to come to the British camp rather than that Major Cavagnari should go to Kabul, as he was afraid for the safety of the British envoy, so strongly were his people against the making of peace.

So to Gandamak he came, the headquarters of the Peshawur Field Force, and on May 26th a treaty was signed, in which all that Cavagnari demanded was agreed to, he, as representing the Government, promising to protect Afghanistan from foreign enemies, and to pay a yearly sum to the Amir. Yakub Khan was invited to send a representative to the Viceregal Court, and it was arranged that Major Cavagnari himself should be the first British Agent to take up his residence at Kabul. "The Amir himself is of a changeable disposition, and I sometimes fancy that his intellect is weak," wrote Cavagnari to the Viceroy. "Only the future can decide how he will turn out. I found the whole lot to be very much of the ordinary Afghan stamp, and that avarice and suspicion were their leading qualities. I have told Yakub Khan that our object is to make him strong, and that he need never fear that British officers will intrigue with any of his discontented chiefs, as this would be working in an opposite direction to that of our avowed object. Englishmen are no match for Asiatics in intrigue, and our only chance is in straightforward dealing, and in showing every one that we consider Yakub Khan our friend, and are prepared to meet him. Whether he can be made to

appreciate and reciprocate the amount of confidence we desire to place in him remains to be seen, but I believe the principle is one worth trying to establish, and I think there is a better chance of its success than may at first sight appear likely."

At all events, the Amir left Gandamak declaring himself to be entirely satisfied, and confident that in the British Government he had friends whom he could trust, while in England the news that the treaty had been signed was joyfully received. Every one declared the right thing had been done, and every one congratulated the Indian Government on a brilliant success.

But Roberts held to his original opinion; and as by the treaty the British retained possession of the Kuram Valley, he determined to become thoroughly acquainted with that country, and especially with all the passes leading to Kabul, for he found this could be done without exciting any suspicions on the part of the tribesmen, who thought it was but natural he should wish to explore the newly-gained territory. He was very anxious as to the arrangements which would be made for the government of Kuram, as he saw that personal influence counted for almost everything among these people, and that a hard and fast official rule would be fatal, at all events for the present. So it was decided that he should go to Simla, both to talk over this matter and also to form one of a Commission which was called to inquire into the whole matter of the expenses of the army in India, and

after that he hoped he would be able to take up the frontier appointment on which he had so set his heart.

Before leaving Kuram, he and a large staff of officers went as far as the Shutargardan Pass with Cavagnari, who was on his way to Kabul, and here he felt a foreboding, which could not be shaken off, that only disaster would come of the mission. Cavagnari himself was in high spirits and full of confidence, though his escort was of the smallest, by his own wish, as he was entirely relying for his safety on the pledges of the Amir, and nothing could have been more cordial than the reception given to the mission as soon as it reached the Afghan border. But in spite of all the hospitality and fair words, Roberts felt unaccountably sad as he said good-bye to the man who was so cheerfully going to a post of duty which was certainly at the same time a post of the utmost danger. Was Cavagnari really confident at heart, and was it merely for old sake's sake that, having once bid good-bye to Roberts and started on his opposite road, he turned back and grasped his friend once more firmly by the hand? Or had he too some dim foreboding of evil?

"Don't tell my wife we saw a single magpie," was one of his last remarks to Roberts; "she would be sure to think it unlucky."

The General returned to Ali Khel, where he summoned all the chiefs and headsmen to a farewell gathering, and rewarded those who had in any way

helped the British interests, while at the same time he saw to it that just payment was made for anything which had been taken from individuals for military purposes. Then, conscious that for the present there was nothing more he could do in the Kuram Valley, he returned very willingly to Simla, where he was warmly welcomed by Lord Lytton, who gave a great banquet in his honour, at which he referred to him as being "the hero of the Afghan War." And from England came the news that he had been made a K.C.B., and had been accorded the thanks of both Houses of Parliament.

At once he began his work on the Army Commission, which had to evolve some scheme by which the army in India could be kept up to its present strength and efficiency, but at a greatly reduced expenditure—by no means an easy result to attain under any circumstances. Roberts, an essentially practical man, felt that one great reduction could be made by altering the old system which kept up three separate armies in India, those of Bombay, Bengal, and Madras, each of them with their own Commander-in-Chief and Staff, and putting them all under the immediate control of the Commander-in-Chief for the whole country. At the request of the Commission he drew up a system based on these lines, which included many other useful suggestions for the improvement of the army. The Commission supported him in the main, and some of his plans were very quickly carried into effect; but govern-

ments move very slowly, and it was not until many years afterwards—not, indeed, till he had left India for good, that the great changes he had striven for became facts. Meanwhile it seemed as if his gloomy presentiments were groundless, for most satisfactory accounts came from Kabul. Cavagnari had been given a brilliant and respectful reception, even the bands having made the best attempt they could at playing "God Save the Queen."

"There is nothing I have to complain about on the part of the Amir," he wrote to Lord Lytton, "though there is no doubt that his authority is most weak throughout the whole of Afghanistan. He is not to be thoroughly trusted any more than any other oriental; still if he has any game in him, I must confess to having not the slightest conception as to what it can be. His conduct of foreign relations is apparently all that could be desired. I can quite understand why he preferred to go to Gandamak than to receive the British Mission here. He did not wish us to see the rottenness of the state of affairs, for fear that we should increase our demands. Notwithstanding all that people say about him, I personally believe that Yakub Khan will turn out to be a very good ally, and that we shall be able to keep him to his engagements."

Yet there were ominous signs in Kabul that the soldiers were suspicious and excited, and strong evidence for believing that they were incited to be so from high quarters. One, Makshbana Khan, a major

in one of our cavalry regiments, who was spending his furlough in Kabul, saw danger ahead and warned Cavagnari, who was always absolutely fearless.

"Never fear," he said; "keep up your heart. Dogs that bark don't bite!"

"These dogs do bite; there is real danger," persisted the old soldier.

But Cavagnari knew that should it be so, flight would be his only means of safety, and such an idea was out of the question. Here was his post, here would he remain.

"They can only kill the three or four of us here," he answered in a matter-of-fact way; "and our death will be avenged."

On September 2nd, he telegraphed to the Viceroy: "All well!"

On September 5th, Roberts was awakened in the middle of the night by the arrival of a telegram.

"Is it bad news from Kabul?" asked Lady Roberts at once, intuitively guessing what had happened.

And bad news it was indeed, so bad that even Sir Frederick himself hoped it was an exaggeration, for the telegram which came from the political officer at Ali Khel ran as follows:—

"One, Jelaladin Ghilzai, who says he is in Sir Louis Cavagnari's secret service, has arrived in hot haste from Kabul, and solemnly states that yesterday morning the Residency was attacked by three regiments who had mutinied for their pay, they having guns, and being joined by a portion of six other

regiments. The Embassy and escort were defending themselves when he left about noon yesterday."

At all events the worst must be prepared for. Roberts at once forwarded the telegram to Lord Lytton, and early in the morning the Council assembled, all unanimous in the opinion that troops must be sent at once to Kabul, either to avenge or to protect Cavagnari; that the troops nearest at hand were those of the Kuram Force, and that Roberts was the man for the work. One telegram after another arrived through the day, many of them so contradictory as to still allow of hope, but at last the gravest fears were confirmed, and it was only too certain that all the members of the mission had been brutally murdered, having sold their lives dearly after a long and heroic defence. All the while Yakub Khan had played a contemptible part, as weak as it was dishonourable, for his attempts to save the men whom he had promised to treat as his guests were not worthy of the name. Yet when the shameful deed had been done, he wrote to Roberts, pleading his helplessness, and adding, "I have lost my friend the envoy, also my kingdom. Am terribly grieved and perplexed."

Lord Lytton was greatly distressed, but his hands were strengthened by a telegram from England promising him unconditional support in whatever vigorous measures he decided to adopt; and from the Queen came a "kind, patriotic, and manly message," which drew from him the remark that "she

is really a better Englishman than any one of her subjects, and never falls short in a national crisis when the interest or honour of her Empire is at stake."

Rarely have "vigorous measures" been adopted with less delay. Within twenty-four hours Roberts had left Simla, under orders to march at once on Kabul with 5000 men. Troops were hurried up to reinforce the Kyber line; and the Amir was informed that a strong British force was on its way to avenge the murders committed, but to support him if it proved to be true that he had loyally done his best to keep the treaty. Roberts rode through Kuram on the 12th of September 1879, fully conscious of the many difficulties before him, with a force still too small for the work; but when he came face to face with the men he had so lately left, and heard their ringing cheers of welcome to the general they were ready to follow to the end of the world, he knew that his troops would not fail him, for "their hearts were on fire, and whatever it was possible for dauntless courage, unselfish devotion and firm determination to achieve, would be achieved by these gallant soldiers."

CHAPTER XI

TOWARDS KABUL

In whatever direction he looked at this moment, nothing but very serious difficulties confronted Sir Frederick Roberts. The movements of his none too large force could not but be seriously handicapped by the want of sufficient transport, making it impossible for all the troops to advance at the same time. On the other hand, delay meant danger, for not only had wintry weather and heavy snow-falls, which would block the Shutargardan Pass, to be met, but every day added to the likelihood of the Afghan army organising itself and preparing for a stubborn defence. Yakub Khan, too, was more difficult to deal with than any open enemy, for while he professed nothing but the most abject sorrow, and his readiness to agree to any and every thing suggested by the British Government as mete punishment for those murderers whom he declared to be "mutinous evildoers," there was never a shadow of doubt in the mind of Roberts that he was all the time playing a double and treacherous game. For one piece of evidence after another made it clear that if the Amir had not actually agreed to the attack on the British Mission, he

had made no genuine effort to prevent or to subdue it.

Two of his agents arrived at Ali Khel a few days after Roberts had reached that spot, nominally to assure the general of their sovereign's fidelity, but actually in the hopes of misleading him as to the real state of affairs, and dissuading him from making an immediate advance on Kabul. "Leave it to the Amir," they urged, "to punish all concerned in the abominable outrage; he would show no mercy, and would make an example conspicuous in the eyes of the world as the sun at noonday. But a general punishment at the hands of British troops would mean revenge, which would fall alike on innocent and guilty, and would result in a rising of the whole people. Later on the Amir would gladly count on the help and protection of a British force, but this was not the moment, though he rejoiced greatly that the Viceroy had given the power to General Roberts, who was great as a soldier and kind of heart."

But Roberts, with all his simplicity of character and readiness to trust, where trust was possible, was not to be taken in, or to be turned aside from his main purpose by fair words, and though he treated the envoys with every courtesy, he let them plainly see that his opinions were unchanged as to the right course to pursue, and that he intended to march on Kabul with as little delay as possible.

So the envoys dispersed, their last friendly act being an attempt to dissuade all the surrounding

tribes from selling food to the British force! Two or three days later the Amir arrived himself, and struck Roberts as being shifty, entirely wanting in force of character, and quite untrustworthy.

Having come as a friend and a guest, it was necessary to treat him as such, and it was even impossible to prevent his receiving and sending out messages, though it was obvious that such messages were questions and answers referring to the strength, numbers, and plans of the British force. He in his turn used every persuasion and argument in his power to keep Roberts from moving forward, his trump card being that he feared for the safety of the women and children in Kabul, none of whom had been got away, as no one had expected the British force to move so quickly.

Roberts finally told him, to his evident dismay, that his orders were to advance at once, and that nothing could alter his determination to do so, but that should any attack on the town be necessary, and this he greatly hoped would be avoided, plenty of time should be given for all women and children to be removed in safety.

Disappointed as was Yakub Khan, he still kept up his outwardly friendly attitude and expressed a wish to remain in the British camp, a wish to which Roberts assented a little reluctantly, though on the whole he felt it was better to keep the Amir where he could see him rather than let

him go back to Kabul. He had left his tents behind him in his capital, so hurriedly and secretly had he fled from there; but they arrived a day later, and a guard of honour was placed over them where they were pitched, so that at least the General might have some idea as to the comings and goings of his unsatisfactory guest.

The next move made by Sir Frederick Roberts was the issuing of a Proclamation to the people of Kabul, which ran thus:—

"Be it known to all that the British Army is advancing on Kabul to take possession of the city. If it be allowed to do so peacefully, well and good; if not, the city will be seized by force. Therefore all well-disposed persons who have taken no part in the dastardly murder of the British Envoy, or in the plunder of the Residency, are warned that if they are unable to prevent resistance being offered to the entrance of the British Army, and the authority of his Highness the Amir, they should make immediate arrangements for their own safety either by coming to the British camp, or by such other measures as may seem fit to them. And as the British Government does not make war on women and children, warning is given that all women and children shall be removed from the city beyond the reach of harm. The British Government desires to treat all classes with justice and to respect their religion, feelings, and customs, while exacting full retribution from offenders.

Every effort will therefore be made to prevent the innocent suffering with the guilty; but it is necessary that the utmost precaution should be taken against useless opposition."

Other orders were issued to the troops, calling upon them to prove themselves worthy of the sacred duty entrusted to them and of the high reputation they had maintained during the recent campaign; impressing on them that the dictates of humanity required a distinction to be made between the peaceable inhabitants of Afghanistan and those treacherous murderers for whom a just retribution lay in store, and emphasising the fact that the future well-being and comfort of the force would depend largely on friendly relations being maintained with those people from whose lands supplies had to be drawn, which friendliness could only be preserved by just payments being made for anything taken.

And then, doubly hampered as he was by the presence of the Amir and the lack of sufficient animals to move his food supplies, Roberts left Kushi, where he had concentrated his force and began his forward march, only to find that the tribesmen all along the way were in a dangerous and hostile frame of mind, probably incited thereto by Yakub Khan, who, though he pretended to be amazed at their behaviour, was himself in a state of great excitement, and was constantly sending and receiving urgent messages from his subjects.

Risky, indeed, was the road, rendered doubly so by the slow rate of progress possible, and Roberts had his own personal share of the dangers, besides the heavy weight of his responsibilities. He was riding with his staff and his old friend General Hills Johns towards a pass he was anxious to reach in daylight, when suddenly they were confronted with a party of Afghans who had taken up a position commanding the road. Waiting till headquarters came up, the enemy let drive into the midst of them. Townshend got a bad wound from a bullet in his cheek, and Roberts was close to him at the time. Some Lancers and a company of the 92nd drove them off, but they hung on to the hills.

This at least became clearer at every step forward, that resistance would have to be faced, a resistance which would increase numerically and morally with every day's delay. Despite the assurances of the Amir and his uncle that the troops were being dispersed, it was evident that, on the contrary, great preparations were being made, and that a large army was on its way out of Kabul to hold the hills around, and to fight every inch on the road of the British advance.

Roberts had reached Charasia, which was only about twelve miles from Kabul, but though the distance was short, the road was difficult in the extreme, for one hill after another—some mere ridges, others much more formidable—barred the

way, and the Afghans had collected a large force of men and guns on these hills, where they awaited the British with the greatest coolness. Even with the small force at his disposal, the general unhesitatingly decided that he must carry those heights before night fell, or the enemy's numbers would be increased to an alarming extent, while their very presence there was "a warning not to be disregarded, a menace not to be brooked."

Thanks to the Amir, the enemy had an accurate knowledge of Roberts's force and the way it had to be divided, so as to allow the available transport to do double work. But great as were both the dangers and difficulties of an attack, the dangers of delay were greater, and once again Roberts proved the advantage of prompt, vigorous action, such as he has ever been ready to conceive, and his army ever equally ready to carry out. Still he had only four thousand available men, and the enemy could be counted in their tens of thousands!

Even that small force had to be divided. The enemy evidently expected an attack on their left, and there had concentrated all their guns; so General Baker with two thousand men was ordered to attack by an outflanking movement on their right, while Roberts himself made a feint in the other direction. Major White with the Gordon Highlanders and some cavalry took up a position with the supporting column, so as to be able to pursue the enemy and cut off their retreat, should the

attack be successful. On a company of the Seaforth Highlanders under Captain Brooke-Hunt, with two companies of the Goorkhas under Captain Cook, fell the brunt of the attack, as they undauntedly fought their way from ridge to ridge, all of them as sturdy of limb as they were bold of spirit. The Goorkhas advanced under cover of a heavy fire from the Highlanders, and at last, to quote an officer present, "the enemy found it too hot, and bolted."

By two o'clock in the afternoon the British soldiers had seized the ridge on the left of the position, but the Afghans, driven back about 600 yards, still fought stubbornly for two hours, at last, however, to be completely repulsed by our irresistible troops, who had been reinforced by some companies of the Gordon Highlanders. Seeing their entire ridge lost to them the enemy beat a hasty retreat, only to find themselves confronted by Major White, who with men and guns drove them before him, his personal gallantry on that day being such as to win him the Victoria Cross. The one thing needful now was cavalry to break up the fleeing hosts, and of cavalry there was all too small a force at hand, nor was the ground suited to their movements. Still the day's work had been highly satisfactory, and Roberts, who at the outset had been somewhat anxious as to its issue, knew that an immense deal had been gained with a far less heavy loss than might have been expected. With twilight he gave his men a well-

earned rest, and saw to it himself that they were well fed, his care for them in this respect being a trait in his character which is always warmly appreciated by the private soldier, who likes to feel his general looks after him when he knows he has done his best for his general!

Daybreak found them all on the move again. Yakub Khan, who had sent Roberts a polite message of congratulation on the day's victory, and had shown no trace of discomposure at the miscarriage of his deeply-laid schemes, now assured him that all opposition was over and that the mutinous regiments had dispersed; but the Amir's reassuring messages were accepted with reservations. The cavalry, however, who had galloped on ahead came back to report that the Bala Hissar, the famous fortress overlooking Kabul, in which lay the Residency, had been deserted by the Afghans, and that, so far as could be judged, the city itself was empty. Later on it was found that a strong body of the enemy had taken up their position on a high hill beyond the Bala Hissar, and Roberts decided that General Baker should attack them there; but in the darkness of the night they too fled, leaving all their guns behind them, and broke up into such small parties, dispersing in all directions, that they slipped through the hands of our force and vanished as if into space.

Camp was pitched within a few hundred yards of the Residency, and Roberts with his staff at once

went through the ruined buildings, which had been the scene, such a short while before, of Cavagnari's brave fight for life. The true story of that desperate struggle which ended in death for all the mission, it was hard to disentangle. One thing alone was clear, the fact that, standing at their posts cool and firm to the last Cavagnari and his colleagues had laid down their lives for England, in a manner worthy of England's greatest sons.

On the following day, just a month after he had left Simla, Roberts made a triumphal entry into Kabul, having routed the Afghans, captured their standards, and taken 150 of their guns without the loss of a single British officer. At his side rode the Amir's eldest son, a child of about six, "with a monkeyish sort of face, which not even the colour and glimmer of his bizarre coat and hat, gorgeous in green and gold, could soften or render prepossessing." The oily-looking Sirdars pressed eagerly forward to pay their respects to the general, who was not cordial to them, knowing full well the treachery and hate which underlay their servile manner; and there was no little excitement to hear the proclamation read, a translation of which was given at the same time. In it Roberts referred to the cowardly and treacherous crime which had brought indelible disgrace upon the Afghan people, and which deserved no less a punishment than that the city of Kabul should be destroyed and its name utterly blotted out. "But," he added, "the great British Govern-

ment is ever desirous to temper justice with mercy, and I now announce to the inhabitants of Kabul that the full retribution for their offence will not be exacted, and that the city will be spared. Nevertheless the punishment inflicted will be such as will be felt and remembered." And then he went on to explain that every man would be disarmed, that fines varying in severity according to the position of the inhabitants would be imposed, and that such buildings as interfered with the safety of the British troops would be destroyed, while various relations of the Amir and some of his Ministers would be kept as prisoners, pending an inquiry into their behaviour during the attack on the Residency.

On the whole, the inhabitants were surprised and relieved at the leniency shown to them, but those few who were to be treated as prisoners were in a state of great alarm and fell to telling their beads at once.

The drawing up of the proclamation had been more distasteful work to Roberts than the march to Kabul, for, as he explains with charming candour, "as regards the military part of my task, I felt some confidence in myself and my ability to undertake it, whereas with respect to the political and diplomatic side of the question, actual personal experience I had none, and I could only hope that common sense and a sense of justice would carry me through." Evidently the Government of India had complete confidence in that common sense, for beyond suggesting a general policy, they had left Roberts a very free

hand, and needless to say he again proved himself "soldier and statesman too." Yakub Khan was the problem of the moment, for untrustworthy though he was, there was much to be said against breaking with him altogether at this period and treating him as an open enemy. Fortunately the Amir took the matter into his own hands, and on the morning of the entry into Kabul he walked unceremoniously into General Roberts's tent and announced that he had decided to resign. His life, he said, had been a burden to him. He had come to regard his countrymen with hatred and fear, and looked on them as dogs and serpents, his only longing was for peace and protection, and he would rather be a grass-cutter in the English camp than ruler of Afghanistan. He seemed so depressed and unnerved, with a look on his face like that of a hunted animal, that Roberts in his kindly, considerate way, tried to calm him down, insisted on giving him breakfast, and told him to take time before finally resolving on so important a step. But the Amir was not to be moved. "I have conceived an utter aversion for these people," he repeated. "I detest them all, and long to be out of Afghanistan for ever."

Roberts assured him that he could not be forced to remain Amir against his own feelings, but that, of course, he personally must wait for authority from the Viceroy in the matter, and till then must ask him to retain his title and keep his determination secret.

In a fortnight came the telegram from Simla accepting his resignation, and Roberts, on behalf of the Government, made public the fact in a proclamation, in which ran these words:—

"The Amir having of his own free will abdicated, has left Afghanistan without a Government. In consequence of the shameful outrage upon its envoy and suite, the British Government has been compelled to occupy Kabul by force of arms and to take military possession of the other parts of Afghanistan. The British Government desires that the people shall be treated with justice and benevolence, and that their religious feelings and customs shall be respected. The British Government, after consultation with the principal Sirdars, tribal chiefs, and others representing the interests and wishes of the various provinces and cities, will declare its will as to the future permanent arrangements to be made for the good government of the people."

For the moment Yakub Khan remained on in the British camp, to all appearance much happier in his mind, and in the evenings he used to walk up and down with the general, listening with much delight to the band, and talking very freely to Roberts on the relations which had existed between his father and the Russian Government; though, after seeing the splendidly prepared condition of the Afghan army, and the way in which Russian influence was evident everywhere in Kabul, it did not need any words of the Amir to emphasise the cordiality of

those relations. To make sure, however, that no secret escape was possible, his tent was pitched close to headquarters, and his "guard of honour" was increased in strength. "He appears," wrote General Roberts, "to have been crushed by his long imprisonment, and to have lost all strength and energy. Altogether, I consider him hopelessly incapacitated for a life of action and responsibility, and I am certain that no reliance could be placed on him for the future were he to remain here as Amir."

Roberts meanwhile had his hands full, in arranging for the temporary government of the town, and securing the safety of his force, for he knew too much of the Afghan people to be blind to the fact that he was set in the midst of many and great dangers. Their submission might easily prove to be but skin-deep, and some strong religious emotion, fanned by an enthusiast, would rouse them all in a moment, so that they would collect against him in their thousands. He was also very dependent for his supplies on his long lines of communication, all of which ran through uncertain, if not openly hostile country, were but weakly guarded, and were liable to be blocked by the wintry weather. First of all, therefore, he looked about for suitable winter quarters, and finally fixed on Sherpur, which, though too large to be easily defended, was the only possible place. The Bala Hissar was not large enough for the whole force, and, moreover, lay unpleasantly near to the gunpowder stores, a likely danger, as

had already been proved by the occurrence of an explosion which was certainly not accidental. Then ample supplies of food, forage, and firewood had to be collected, and though good prices were offered, these came in so slowly as to make it certain that the neighbourhood was hostile. Neither was the news reassuring which came from the little garrisons on the lines of communication, for it was the same old story of continual attacks from an enemy always on the alert, always strong in numbers.

And as if all these responsibilities were not enough, another attack was made from England on this most humane of generals, this time on the severity of his proclamations, and on a special charge of having allowed his men to burn alive their wounded enemies after the battle of Charasia. If proof were needed at all to show the reputation which Roberts had won for generosity and leniency, it was provided by Yakub Khan himself, who, when he finally departed from the British camp for India, told the general that "he left his wives and children in his hands, in the fullest confidence that they would be well treated and cared for"; while, as the result of the commission of inquiry into the attack on the Residency, less than fifty men were punished, and pardon was granted freely to all who could prove that they had fought against the British forces under a mistaken idea that the Amir was a prisoner and was calling on his subjects to rise in his defence. Indeed, so lenient and generous was

the treatment accorded to "enemies who no longer resist," that many of the older officers present shook their heads, saying that we had come there as judges to avenge a crime, and that such generosity would be a source of danger before long, as it was neither appreciated nor understood by the treacherous Afghan.

Already signs were not wanting, even in Kabul itself, to show that though the Afghans had been paralysed for the moment by the dash and rapidity of Roberts's advance, and were further disconcerted by the collapse of the Amir, they were far from being reconciled to the present state of affairs. To most of them the presence of a victorious British force in their capital meant the presence of "infidels and aliens," enemies to their faith and freedom, whom they must resist to the death. The flight of Yakub Khan had handed over the power into the hands of the British, and the Afghans, burning with resentment and smarting under defeat, were not in the frame of mind to welcome good government or just dealing. General Roberts soon became aware of the intensity of the feeling against the Government he represented, and friendly Afghans began to drop hints of a deadly combination which was being formed among the tribes around Kabul, against whose numbers the tiny British force would be unable to stand. Before long it was clear that the dangers ahead were stern realities. Led by an aged priest, Mooshk-

i-Alam, himself so infirm that he had to be carried about on a bed, the Mullahs and religious teachers throughout the country began to incite the people vehemently in every mosque, calling on them, if they would be true followers of the Prophet, to gird on their arms and fly to fight under the standard which was to be raised against "the infidel and the pig-eating Kaffir." It was just such a rallying-cry as this, which was able to draw all the people together, making them willing to lay aside their many differences and jealousies in their eagerness to fight for their faith; and when a strong leader, Mahomed Jhan, began to organise their armies at Ghazni, the movement grew with lightning rapidity.

Roberts did not for a moment underestimate the seriousness of the situation, but he was badly handicapped by the impossibility of getting any information he could rely on as to the numbers or the movements of the enemy fast gathering around him, beyond a general idea that they intended attacking Kabul from the north, south, and west. This plan of campaign, he felt, could only be averted by his being able to meet and disperse those separate forces in detail before they could join hands, and though this meant dividing his own force into two columns, and abandoning to some degree his present strong defensive position, it was the plan he decided to adopt, leaning, as he ever did, to a bold and dashing stroke.

He therefore sent out two columns, one under

Macpherson, with orders to attack the tribesmen coming from the north, and prevent them from joining those coming from the west; the other, under Baker, to lie in wait on the only line of retreat available to the enemy if they were successfully beaten back by Macpherson.

The plan was simple enough, but its success hung on a perfect combination between the two columns, and when this failed unexpectedly, nothing but the coolness, the resource, and the brilliant generalship of Roberts averted a terrible disaster.

CHAPTER XII

THE STRUGGLE AT SHERPUR

On the 8th of December Macpherson started on his way to Arghandah, near where he hoped to meet Mahomed Jhan's force, Baker waiting till the following morning, when, after a pretended move towards Charasia, he marched as arranged to wait on the Ghazni road. But a reconnaissance sent out by Roberts caused him to change his original plans, and to order Macpherson at once to attack and scatter a large force marching towards Kohistan to join Mahomed Jhan, driving them, if possible, towards Baker. This Macpherson did vigorously, and at the right moment; for he successfully beat back the Kohistanis, drove them from the hill where they had taken up their position, and captured some of their standards before Mahomed Jhan could move to their assistance. So far, therefore, all was good; and Roberts, regarding this action rather as an interlude, now hoped to put his first scheme into effect, and ordered Macpherson to march early next morning to drive the enemy towards Badfer, while to strengthen him he sent General Massy and another column of horse artillery and cavalry, with orders to keep in close

touch with the main column, to advance cautiously and quietly, and on no account to allow himself to be drawn into action independently of Macpherson. Every detail of this plan had been worked out by Roberts, and, knowing the ground over which the columns had to travel, he had even calculated the exact hour at which each general ought to start so as to join hands at the right time and place, and, confident that all was satisfactory, he set out himself somewhat later, intending to meet Macpherson and Massy when the junction was effected.

But as is generally the case with well-laid plans, one false move is fatal; and on this occasion Massy failed to play his part.

As Roberts rode along, he heard, to his dismay, the sound of heavy firing; and found that Massy, instead of proceeding "quietly and cautiously," had marched along the shortest route, and had been attacked by Mahomed Jhan, who, knowing that Macpherson's Brigade was several miles away, and seeing that Massy had only cavalry, which could not do much owing to the nature of the country, advanced boldly, opened out his line, and quite outflanked the little force, unchecked by the fire of their battery. The enemy, numbering over ten thousand, came on, finely led, and never wavering, their forty standards floating over them. So hard did they press, that Massy was forced to retire, and his guns became badly jammed in

the dykes on the road, though the cavalry made splendid efforts to extricate them, the lancers dismounting and firing at carbine range. This was the sight of confusion and seemingly certain disaster which met Roberts as he rode up with his staff.

But his very presence brought confidence, and his coolness gave fresh courage to the sorely-pressed troops, as quickly and calmly he gave his orders. Infantry must be got up without delay, so a messenger was sent back to Kabul to fetch some of the well-tried Highlanders, and to warn General Gough, then in command there, of what was happening, while an A.D.C. galloped off in hot haste to find Macpherson, and urge him to hurry forward to the rescue.

A critical moment indeed it was!

If it came to a hand-to-hand fight with Afghan knives, the British force could not escape annihilation, and the victorious Mahomed Jhan would march on Kabul. If by any means the enemy could be kept at bay for the moment till reinforcements came up, the situation, perilous as it was, might yet be saved.

Still there were less than three hundred men with four guns to face ten thousand.

Two cavalry charges, heroic though of little avail, were made by the 9th Lancers, partly to gain time, and partly in the hopes of allowing the guns to retire in safety. "Into a cloud of dust the Lancers

disappeared as they headed for the masses of the enemy, and nothing could be seen for a few moments of the fight. Then riderless horses came galloping back, followed by scattered bodies of troopers. They had been received with a terrific fire which had killed many horses and men, and on trying to force their way through the enemy, had been surrounded and beaten back by sheer force of numbers. Even among Roberts and his staff, the bullets fell thickly, killing three or four horses and wounding others." But when the dust had vanished, it was evident that the charge had made no impression on those steady ranks, which moved persistently forward, their banners waving exultantly.

Only the steady fire of British infantry could have broken that line, and there was nothing for it but that the cavalry should retire, which they did, reluctantly though steadily.

Once again Roberts had a hair-breadth escape, for as he was fearlessly helping some men out of a ditch, he was attacked, knife in hand, by one of the enemy, and was only saved by the loyalty and presence of mind of a Bengal cavalryman, who, riderless, was following his chief on foot, and who pluckily seized the assailant by the waist and threw him into the ditch.

A few moments' lucky pause given by Mahomed Jhan, who believed that the British infantry were in the village close at hand, gave the cavalry time

to rally, and to again beat back the enemy for a while; Roberts's hope being that by holding them in check till the village of Dehmazung was reached, time enough would have been allowed for the Highlanders to come up. And so it happily turned out. Thirsting for a fight, the men of the Seaforth Highlanders doubled along, reaching Dehmazung in the nick of time, amid cheers of welcome from the Lancers, and soon from all the house-tops and walls, a volley of fire descended into the Afghan ranks. "It was," writes an eye-witness, "literally touch and go as to who could reach the village first, the Highlanders or the Afghans, but our men swept in and swarmed to the tops of the houses, able to check the rush of the enemy, who streamed down on the village like ants on a hill."

General Macpherson, meanwhile, had started as directed early in the morning to play his part in the general scheme, and was, as he fondly hoped, on the point of joining hands with Baker, when, to his dismay and horror, the sound of artillery fire burst upon his ears, and it soon became only too evident that Massy's column had fallen in with the enemy. This could hardly mean anything but disaster, as Macpherson knew how completely outnumbered the British force must be, and how impossible it would therefore be for cavalry, however dashing, to hold their own against such odds. So, spurring on his ready troops, he pushed forward, and at noonday reached the spot where the fiercest

struggle had taken place, and where the dead bodies of our officers and men told its own sad story. Such a sight made the men burn for action, and so resolute was their attack, that in four hours Mahomed Jhan's force was scattered, and Macpherson had joined the Highlanders at Dehmazung.

On their arrival Roberts went back to Sherpur, disappointed at the failure of his well-conceived plan, but thankful that the disaster, which at one time seemed irretrievable, had been averted, and prouder than ever of his brave troops, who had risen so grandly to the occasion. Before starting, too, the good news was brought in that the guns had been recovered, having been pulled out of the water-courses, and were now on their way to Sherpur, the hero of this feat being Macgregor, chief of staff to Roberts, who, becoming separated from the main body, with a few Sikhs and Goorkhas, discovered that the Afghans, in their forward rush, had left a very small force to protect the guns. Gathering together all the stragglers and stray horses he could muster, with the addition of a few men of the 67th, who were guarding Macpherson's baggage—about sixty men in all—Macgregor extended them in skirmishing order, made for the guns, extricated them with great difficulty, and, though only four horses were available for each gun, brought them back in triumph. On reaching Sherpur, Roberts found that, thanks to the precautions taken by General Hugh Gough, all there was satisfactory,

in spite of the very alarming rumours which had reached the place, though the arrival of horseless Lancers and of Artillerymen, bringing news of guns spiked and abandoned, had added greatly to the anxiety of all in the cantonment.

Kabul itself was quiet, but the Afghans were taking up positions on the ridges around, and Roberts knew that the crisis was far from being over. The people in Kabul were not to be depended upon, however loud they might be in their protestations of friendliness, and there seemed nothing for him under the circumstances but to withdraw from the city within the cantonments, and there await the attack which now looked inevitable, still holding, however, certain points of vantage outside. Things certainly looked bad, but Roberts was not the man to be discouraged; difficulties only braced up his determination, and even at that moment one of his officers described him as "the most cheerful man in camp." In view of the possibility that his telegraphic lines might be cut, he sent messages to those in command on his lines of communication arranging for reinforcements if necessary, and he was thankful for the wise precaution he had taken on the previous day, in ordering up from Jalalabad that fine body of fighting men, the Guides.

Having thus done all that was possible for the moment, he snatched a few hours sleep.

Morning brought something good in the arrival

of the Guides, and the news that Baker was safe with his column and was on his way to Sherpur. But it also showed that the enemy were in a strong position on the Takht-i-Shah (the King's Throne), a peak overlooking Kabul, which, while affording ample cover to the men holding it, was steep, strewn with boulders, and full of difficulties to any attacking force.

But Roberts held that the height must be taken, and at nine o'clock on the morning of December 13th the attacking brigade moved off, the Gordon Highlanders cheering loudly when they saw that the honour of leading fell to them. Nothing could have been finer than the way in which they proved themselves worthy of that honour, and though once the assault had to be deferred, to prevent the enemy from reinforcing themselves by holding their line of retreat, Highlanders and Guides fought magnificently side by side, led as magnificently by their officers. Young Forbes, who lost his life in trying to protect the dead body of his colour-sergeant from being mutilated, with White and Dick-Cunyngham, of the Gordon Highlanders, comrades in many a fight, and comrades to the last in Ladysmith, are names which stand out conspicuously on that day, and at last the heliograph flashed the good news to Sherpur that the position was won.

General Baker's flank, which had been attacked, had also been successful, after a fine cavalry charge led by Captain Beetson, of the 9th Lancers, who

fell calling to his men "to come on for the honour of the old 9th"; but though he was shot through the heart almost at once, the cavalry rode through the enemy and scattered them over the plain. So satisfactory had been both these engagements, that Roberts began to hope the rebuffs might disorganise the enemy and break up, to some extent, their combination. But the dawn of the 14th dispelled any such illusion, and with daylight he saw ever increasing masses of men, with their standards, in occupation of a high hill on the Kohistan road, evidently concentrating for a strong combined attack on Sherpur from the north-west, and composing a force of far greater strength than even he had believed they could muster. Once again he resolved to take the initiative; to attack them without delay; to drive them from the heights, where their presence was a formidable danger to the cantonment; and to cut off their communications to the north.

To General Baker, Roberts entrusted the task, and at first all went well. A small eminence was seized which would intercept the enemy's reinforcements in two directions; an important conical hill was occupied and held by some of the Seaforth Highlanders and Guides Corps, and eventually the most valuable position in the Aswai heights was taken after a fierce struggle, in which the enemy, especially the Ghilzais, faced death with a reckless audacity which told of their eagerness to

sacrifice their lives for the sake of their religion and for the glory which they held would be theirs, if they could kill all infidels.

Roberts, watching the issues of the fight from a house-top, once more breathed freely. Again the unbeaten courage of his troops had averted the danger. But suddenly the situation changed, and a heliograph message from Macpherson told of overwhelming numbers moving forward to retake the original position. Soon they were to be seen, covering the plain for miles, marching in orderly array till they reached a certain point, and then dividing up for three separate attacks, one being specially directed towards the conical hill held by Colonel Clark, of the Guides, with about 200 men. To the handful of men on the ridge they seemed as myriads, and no volleys or shells seemed able to make the least impression upon them, for on they came unswervingly, and as one fell another stepped into his place, till they stood within 150 yards of our men. To withstand such a force was impossible, and Roberts for the first time had to see his troops retiring, steadily and in good order, it is true, but still retiring, outmatched and outnumbered. From every point of view it was a sad sight, and most serious of all was the moral effect it could not fail to have on the enemy, increasing tenfold their confidence and giving a fresh stimulus to their fanatical enthusiasm. Moreover, as he watched them, it became clear to Roberts that these men possessed

a discipline and a determination on which he had not calculated, and every heliographic message brought news that their numbers were everywhere increasing, and that from all directions their reinforcements were approaching.

With the utmost sorrow and reluctance, Roberts decided that for the safety of his troops and for their ultimate success, he must withdraw them from all the outlying positions, and, for the time being, concentrate them within the cantonment of Sherpur, there to wait strictly on the defensive till some favourable chance for attack should occur, or until time, which was on his side, should in some degree break up the enemy, who had no supplies to keep their numbers in the field through the wintry months. Horrible it was indeed for any general to have to order the evacuation of positions so hardly won, but Roberts was as strong in the hour of his defeat as in the hour of his victory, and acted in the same far-seeing and vigorous way. By night all his men were safe in the cantonment, and he met them with a bright face and a cheery manner, which soon restored their confidence and made them feel that though for the moment they were held in check, disaster was an impossible word so long as he was there in their midst.

While his telegraph lines were still intact he sent messages to the Commander-in-Chief and the Viceroy, neither minimising the gravity of the situation nor exaggerating its dangers, and, thanks to

the precautions he had taken and the strenuous preparations he had made, he was able to assure them that he had ample stores, ammunition, and hospital necessaries in Sherpur to enable that garrison to hold out for quite three months. His immediate object was to strengthen his defences, in case Mahomed Jhan, flushed with his success, should attempt an immediate attack. Shelter trenches were thrown up, wire entanglements laid down, and every regiment was told off to a particular point, while sentries and piquets closely posted, all kept an eager watch, and a Defence Committee saw to it that nothing was left undone to make the cantonment secure.

Of foes without there were plenty—over 100,000 desperate men at least—and Roberts had some misgivings as to the loyalty of all the troops inside Sherpur, for it was a hard test to demand of the Pathans, that they should remain true, when all of their own religion were calling for a religious war. To suspect them would have been equally fatal; the only thing was to stake all on their honour. They were therefore still left in responsible positions, strengthened in a way which could not hurt their feelings, by the staunch Highlanders.

The Sirdars, who had thrown in their lot with the British interests, and who now demanded a safe refuge in the cantonment, formed another unknown quantity, and had to be closely watched. Roberts felt bound at such a crisis to act more sternly than

was his wont, and so put under arrest the late Afghan Commander-in-Chief, who, charming and friendly as he appeared to be, was not above suspicion.

For several days quiet prevailed, as the enemy made no move, while inside the cantonment all waited cheerfully, despite the bitter cold and the heavy snows, which made sentry and outpost duty a real hardship.

"Waiting for the attack, though, is terribly monotonous," wrote one of the garrison, "and we feel half inclined to go out to deal with the enemy. But fortunately for them they are in Kabul, and struggling with our small force would be a useless sacrifice of life. Mahomed Jhan has had the coolness to open negotiations with propositions of such an order that it is impossible to believe them serious." "We have a lakh of men eager to rush on their prey like dogs; we can no longer control them," is one of their messages. "But we laugh at the terms so considerately offered, and take such vapouring at its real value."

On the 21st of December, however, there were everywhere signs that the Afghans had finished with inactivity and were preparing to deliver their *grand coup*. In the mosques, the priests worked up the people to a fever pitch of excitement, and a general movement took place out of the city to the forts east of Sherpur, evidently the direction from which the assault was to be made. News was brought in,

too, that scaling-ladders were being got ready, and that the aged high-priest, Mooskh-i-Alam, would himself light a beacon fire on the Aswai heights, as a signal for the assault which was to commence on December 23rd, a religious festival.

The tidings in no way alarmed the garrison, who were confident of the result, and were prepared at every point. Roberts was calm and hopeful; every soldier had his allotted post, and rejoiced to feel the hour for action had come at last. The war-songs of the Afghans, fierce and fragmentary, broke the stillness of the night on December 22; then, just before dawn, the signal fire flashed from the heights, followed by single shots from every direction.

It was now or never for the attack. The spirits of our men went up in answer to the challenge. As a good omen, there had come a few hours before a heliograph message, which said that General Charles Gough, with reinforcements, was close at hand, and the morning of the assault showed that he was only six miles distant. Everything promised well.

Eager as were the men to commence, they were held back to await the real attack; and just before six, a roar of excited voices bearing down on the eastern trenches, "as if hosts of devils had been let loose," made it clear that this was to be the main point of assault. A seething, dense mass could be seen advancing, and their shouts of "Allah-il-Allah" thundered through the stillness of the misty dawn. General Hugh Gough, with the Guides, and

some men of the 28th Punjab Infantry, the 67th Foot, and the Gordon Highlanders, was in command of the eastern defence; and as the mist cleared away, to show hosts of dusky forms close at hand, the order was at last given to our men to open fire. Their patience was rewarded, for so close were the Afghans, that the volleys were deadly in their effect, and so heavy was the fire poured upon them, that every attempt of theirs to scale the wall was repulsed. But for three hours they never slackened the fierceness of their attack, and more than once they reached the abattis, only to be held in check by the steady, well-directed fire of our men in the trenches and behind the parapets. Then came a momentary lull, followed by another fierce assault. No fire, however heavy, could force back a foe so fearless—a foe who courted death—in such a fight. Roberts, therefore, determined to resort to his favourite tactics and try a flank attack. So the Punjab Cavalry, with four guns, moved out and began to shell the villages round Bemaru, where the Ghilzais had taken up their position. At the same moment, clouds of dust in the distance, and the flashing of a heliograph, must have warned Mahomed Jhan that the dreaded reinforcements had arrived, and that he was in danger of being caught between two forces. With a suddenness which was quite unexpected he collapsed; the flank attack was energetically made, the Afghans responded but half-heartedly, they

wavered; then they fled demoralised. In a moment Roberts sent the cavalry in pursuit, ordering every available man and horse to turn out and do their utmost. On they galloped, burning down the empty villages and forts as they passed, clearing the ground in every direction, scattering the enemy far and wide, intercepting the fugitives, and making any further combination impossible. By evening, no trace of that great host was to be seen, and once more peace and silence reigned around. The short winter's day drew to a close, and, with feelings of the utmost satisfaction, Roberts could review the result of the day's work. The nine days of inaction shut up in the cantonments were over; "the first time the General has ever been confined to barracks in his life," as the men used to jokingly remark; and once more Kabul was in his hands, while that great and dangerous combination of 100,000 men had been effectually broken up. His losses were wonderfully light, only eighteen killed and sixty-eight wounded, those including followers during the nine days, and his troops had everywhere justified his trust in them. No wonder that inside the cantonment on that night, cheers and songs reflected the good spirits of the men, although they drank to the success of the day in cocoa only, as rum rations were scarce; and sentry duty having been cut down to a minimum, a well-earned sleep and pleasant dreams fell to the lot of most.

Morning brought plenty of work. Telegraphic

communication had to be restored with India, that the news of victory might be sent on without delay; Kabul, wrecked, looted, and plundered, had to be reoccupied, and good order had to take the place of riot within its walls. Without delay Sir Frederick Roberts issued a generous proclamation, offering a free pardon to all who at once made their submission, Mahomed Jhan, with other of the leaders, being excepted.

"Come without fear," he said, "of whatsoever tribe you be. You can then remain in your houses in comfort and safety, and no harm will befall you. The British Government has no enmity towards the people. Any one who rebels again will, of course, be punished. This condition is necessary. But all who come in without delay need have no fear or suspicion. The British Government speaks only that which is in its heart."

To this the people responded so readily that in a very few days Kabul bore few traces of the recent reign of terror. General Hills was made Governor of the city, a dispensary was opened for the natives; and the Afghans began to trust conquerors who could use their power so mercifully. Christmas Day found peace reigning around, the very hills, snow-covered and spotlessly white, accentuating the silence; and though men do not rejoice uproariously when they have just come back from facing the awful realities of life and death, the troops kept up the day with as much of its usual ceremony as was

possible under the circumstances, only wishing that those at home could have heard the good news of their victory.

And the General himself, on whose shoulders had rested so heavy a responsibility, on whose quick, accurate judgment so much had depended, could look back on the year fast dying—a year which had been full of events, full of possibilities to him—conscious that his work had not been in vain, although his modesty would only allow him to admit that "the present outlook was fairly satisfactory."

CHAPTER XIII

FROM KABUL TO KANDAHAR

ONCE more in undisputed possession of Kabul, Sir Frederick Roberts lost no time in laying down the general lines of his policy. For the present, British troops, in sufficiently strong numbers to hold their own, would remain in the city, and military law would prevail; but this would only be until such times as a ruler for Afghanistan could be found from among the Sirdars, who, while possessing the confidence of his own people, could be relied on as a strong and staunch ally of Great Britain.

"While determined to make the frontiers of my Indian Empire strong, the principle on which my Government has hitherto acted remains unchanged, and I desire to be in friendly relations alike with those who rule in Afghanistan and with the people of that country."

So ran the Queen's Speech as delivered to the Houses of Parliament in February 1880, and in Kabul, Roberts took every opportunity of showing a conciliatory spirit towards the tribesmen. The murder of Cavagnari had been avenged; the strength of the British Government had been asserted; there was neither the need nor the desire

to press the victory further. A proclamation of amnesty was issued at once, offering, with very few exceptions, pardon to all those tribes who would send representatives without delay to Sherpur. Their safety was promised; they were not asked to bind themselves by any conditions; on the contrary, they were treated as "men who had been misled by ill-advised rebels, and who, if they went back to their homes, there to live in peace and order, would find the British Government ready to respect their lives, their property, and their religion."

This leniency amazed a people whose methods of treating a conquered foe were very different, and many chiefs responded to this invitation. A grand durbar was held at which numbers of them were present, and at which very handsome gifts were made to those few who had remained loyal to us during that critical time. In true oriental fashion, the very men who but a short time before had led their followers in thousands against us, now cringed low to the General who had routed them, and made obeisance to him in abject humility. It was a striking scene, and most curious of all was the puzzled expression on the faces of the chiefs as they came close to the man who had scattered their hosts as if by magic, and yet who now was offering them forgiveness, safety, and protection.

"An amusing incident," writes an eye-witness, "was the presentation of Padshah Khan to General Roberts. As his name was called out there was

something like a titter all round, for even Afghans have a sense of humour, and they could not help appreciating the shamefacedness of this Ghilzai chief, who, after aiding the British to reach Kabul, had striven to drive them out, and then accepted the forgiveness so freely offered. He came forward in his usual cringing way, and on his sunburnt cheeks just a tinge of colour mounted, the nearest approach to a blush that he could raise. Even General Roberts joined in the general smile which spread from face to face at the evident discomfort of the chief; while the latter went back to his place smiling also, as if a great weight had been lifted from his mind."

At the same time, lest this generosity should be mistaken for fear or weakness, the least suspicion of which would have been fatal, the engineers worked busily at strengthening the defences of Kabul, and made it clear that a second investment of Sherpur was to be put outside the bounds of possibility.

An excellent piece of work, which touched the poorest class of people in Kabul, turning them from foes to friends, was the establishment of a dispensary by Doctor Charles Owen, of course under the immediate support of Roberts. There was a great deal of illness and suffering among these people, and when once they got over their suspicions (one being that Doctor Owen was Cavagnari, risen from the dead), they

flocked to the dispensary in thousands. Blindness was a common disease among them; it was hardly therefore to be wondered at that when several operations had proved so successful that men and women got back their sight, the English doctor was looked on as a worker of miracles and trusted implicitly. In less than three months he treated over ten thousand patients, and daily grew the wonder of the people at behaviour of this sort from the hands of their victorious enemies.

As another proof of his desire to assure the people of British friendliness, General Roberts appointed a native, the Wali Mahomed, to be Governor of Kabul, and tried in every way to find out their views and wishes as to the future government of the country. But in spite of this humane and generous policy, which was fast restoring confidence and good feeling in Kabul, once more the old cry of cruelty and severity was raised in England against General Roberts and his troops, and a memorial was forwarded on the subject to the Premier, which charged Roberts with proclaiming that all who had opposed the British forces would be treated as rebels, and declared that large numbers of Afghans had been executed on the mere grounds of having fought with the enemy. Of course Roberts was able to declare in a letter read to the House of Commons that these statements were "totally devoid of truth," and that no soldiers had been

executed for fighting against us. "Had any other troops but British been in Kabul," he wrote about this time, "the city would have been razed to the ground. The Afghans quite expected this, and never ceased to wonder at our leniency."

Still, accusations of this sort cast an altogether undeserved slur on a general whose humanity was proverbial, and on troops conspicuous for their merciful treatment of their enemies.

Hard as had been the task in Afghanistan from a soldier's point of view, the task of settlement was likely to be equally so.

"I regard the quiet, methodical rapidity with which, under inconceivably difficult conditions, Roberts has collected at Sherpur five months' food and three months' forage, with abundance of firewood for his whole force, and the foresight with which, from the first day of his arrival at Kabul, he has been steadily fortifying that position for defence, as his two greatest military achievements, although doubtless the importance of them will never be fully appreciated by the public. I wish I could strengthen his political staff, but the worst of it is that Afghanistan is a *terra incognita* to all our present politicals."

So wrote Lord Lytton to the Secretary of State for India; and he went on to explain the necessity of finding, without delay, a strong ruler for Kabul, selected by the people themselves. Kandahar was to be detached from Kabul and allowed its own

hereditary ruler, who would of course be supported by the British Government.

A certain number of the chiefs were inclined to lean towards Yakub Khan, who now declared that he had never willingly abdicated, but had been forced to do so by cruel and ungenerous pressure. Both Lord Lytton and Sir Frederick Roberts, however, were agreed that under no circumstances could the late Amir be reinstated, and this they made clear to the chiefs. In the first place there was no doubt that Yakub could have prevented the murder of Cavagnari and the Embassy had he been in the least desirous of doing so, and to have restored him would have been to treat the massacre as an accident rather than as a terrible crime, for which a very heavy punishment was richly merited. Besides, his weakness and treachery in the past had clearly shown that he was in no way to be relied on, and every consideration of policy and common sense was against his being allowed to take up the reins of government again.

Among the Sirdars there were four, on either of whom the choice might ultimately fall. The first was Wali Mahomed, acting under General Roberts as Governor of Kabul, a man with very pleasant manners, but of little ability and possessing no really strong following. Hassan Khan, another candidate—a son-in-law of Sher Ali—was in high favour with the favourite wife of the late Amir,

who was in herself a most important ally. Beyond the fact, however, that he had behaved in a plucky manner on the day of the disaster to General Massy's column, he had nothing very special to recommend him. Ayoob Khan, the brother of Yakub, was known to be rash and very headstrong, and at that very time was a prisoner among his own troops at Herat, so he was hardly suitable. The fourth name was that of Abdur Rahman, a well-known soldier who was popular among the army, but owing to family quarrels he had been living for some years more or less as a pensioner in Russian territory, and at that moment it seemed impossible to get at him. However, Sir Donald Stewart was in touch with his mother, who lived in Kandahar, and it was generally felt that he was the most likely man to fill satisfactorily this difficult post. Communications passed, from which it was evident that the Sirdar was more than willing to become Amir, and had a wholesome respect for British power, so that when he arrived in Afghanistan in the April of 1880, the time seemed ripe for negotiations.

As might have been expected, Abdur Rahman began by attempting to play the old game of intrigue, so dear to the mind of his race, but when he found it was discovered and was not in the least likely to succeed, he changed his tactics; and as his popularity increased rapidly among the people, a final agreement was come to with him in July,

and he was publicly acknowledged as Amir of Afghanistan at a grand durbar, both Sir Donald Stewart and Sir Frederick Roberts being present. The government of the country was handed over to him unconditionally, and he was promised British support in so far as he proved himself able and disposed to conciliate the confidence of his countrymen, without forfeiting the good understanding he undertook to maintain with the British Government. Mr. Leppel Griffin, the political officer who had conducted the negotiations, wrote: "Abdur Rahman is a man of about forty, of middle height, and rather stout. He has an exceedingly intelligent face, brown eyes, a pleasant smile, and a frank and courteous manner. The impression he left on me and on all the officers present was most favourable, and he appeared to be animated by a sincere desire to be on good terms with the English Government."

Sir Donald Stewart, who had arrived at Kabul a short time before the durbar was held, had taken over the supreme command, as being senior to Roberts, who, however, still retained the command of the troops which had formed the Kabul Field Force. It had been arranged, that directly after the durbar, the troops were to be withdrawn, and the day following the proclamation of the new Amir, Roberts made a journey to Gandamak, as he was anxious to see the Khyber Pass before finally starting back to India with his column. Everything at that moment looked promising, and there was a universal feel-

ing of relief, for every one thought that the war in Afghanistan had come at last to a satisfactory end. It is therefore all the more curious that Roberts, as he rode towards the Khyber Pass, suddenly felt a conviction that something was wrong, and so strong was this conviction, that it made him alter his plans and turn back as quickly as possible towards Kabul.

Before long he met Sir Donald Stewart, riding fast to overtake him, and bringing word of a sudden and quite unexpected disaster from Maiwand, where Ayoob Khan had utterly defeated General Burrows' brigade, and was besieging the remainder of the English force under General Primrose in Kandahar.

The news was certainly of an alarming character, for the telegram spoke of a "terrible disaster which had ended in the annihilation of General Burrows' force," and urged the need for immediate assistance.

For some time past, Ayoob Khan had threatened Kandahar, and Sher Ali, the newly appointed ruler, had informed the English political officer that he could not rely on his own troops, as if Ayoob declared a religious war, as it seemed probable he would, the men would all flock to his banner. He begged therefore that some English troops might be ready to help him if necessary, and accordingly General Burrows was sent with a brigade. As Sher Ali had foreseen, a mutiny broke out among his men, who deserted in a body and

went over to Ayoob Khan, then close at hand with a force of over 25,000. At Maiwand was fought a disastrous battle in which the handful of British troops were quite unable to hold their ground. They were broken up, and scattered, after more than half their number had been killed or wounded. A few stragglers escaped to Kandahar to carry news of the disaster, and to prepare General Primrose for the move on the citadel, which Ayoob Khan, on the strength of his victory, would certainly make.

So another crisis had arisen, and at a moment when a crisis was least desired, for it was impossible to tell how Abdur Rahman would act in this, the first test laid on him, and any wavering on his part would mean the undoing of many months' work. There was always, too, the possibility that one stroke of success would be the signal for another general rising among the tribesmen. One thing was certain; whatever was done must be done at once, for only a decisive, well-directed blow could neutralise the present situation. And Roberts, who by now thoroughly understood the character of the enemy he had to deal with, was not long in preparing a scheme, which, with the full consent of Sir Donald Stewart, he cabled to the Viceroy. He proposed that the withdrawal of all the troops from Kabul should take place as arranged, and as if no alarm were felt at the recent disaster; that the greater portion of the force

should march straight to Kandahar under his command, the remainder returning to India, as there would be no object, and a good deal of risk in keeping a force, too small to be effective, in a hostile country. "You need have no fears about my division. It will take care of itself and will reach Kandahar under the month. I will answer for the loyalty and good feeling of the native portion," were the concluding words of his telegram, which at once brought a satisfactory reply from Simla.

Sir Donald Stewart gave Roberts a free hand in the selection of his force, which was to consist of about ten thousand men, British, Sikh, and Goorkha soldiers, those being specially chosen who had been through the whole campaign, between whom and their general the most perfect understanding and confidence prevailed. The men, far from being disappointed at the turn affairs had taken, were all eager for the new expedition, and were proud of being included in a force which was in every sense of the word a picked force. Thanks to the work of the last few months, Roberts had plenty of transport ready in good condition, and the Amir, who cordially approved of the proposed step, knowing that Ayoob Khan was his own most dangerous rival, agreed to send several men of importance ahead of the column, to arrange with the natives for the provision of supplies, though of course Roberts did not rely entirely on this means for the feeding of his

men. Altogether preparations were made quickly, and early in August all was ready for a start.

A bold move it certainly was, this of marching a large body of troops through a country the inhabitants of which could not be depended upon, and with no base on which to fall back for supplies or reinforcements. Many people, especially those at home who criticise freely on all occasions, however slender their knowledge of facts, shook their heads and predicted more terrible disasters. But men on the spot were confident. They knew their General was ever ready to venture. But they had supreme belief in him, and their opinion of the expedition was summed up in the words: "A risky undertaking, which we all believe is going to be successful."

A farewell dinner was given to Roberts in Kabul just before he started, and in reply to a toast, wishing him good health, and good fortune to his column, he made a straightforward, simple speech, every word of which breathed confidence as to the future. "With such troops," he said, "success is a certainty. Without wishing to underrate the dangers and difficulties of the task before us, I feel quite certain that the efficient force which Sir Donald Stewart has placed at my disposal will succeed in reaching Kandahar as quickly as possible, and in effectually disposing of any Afghan army that may be brought against us."

On the 8th of August the force moved away

from Sherpur into their own camp, and in the cool of the evening Sir Donald Stewart, with many of those who were to return with him to India, rode out to say a last good-bye to the men before whom lay such an adventurous journey. "Good luck and good-bye" sounded all around, and when the visitors had left, the troops were assembled, and this stirring order from Roberts was read out to them: "It has been decided by the Government of India that a force shall proceed with all possible despatch from Kabul towards Khelati Ghilzai, for the relief of the British garrison in those places, now threatened by a large Afghan army, under the leadership of Sirdar Mahomed Ayoob Khan. Sir Frederick Roberts feels sure that the troops placed under his command for this important duty will cheerfully respond to the call made upon them, notwithstanding the privations and hardships inseparable from a long march through a hostile country. The adjutant-general wishes to impress on both officers and men, the necessity of preserving the same strict discipline which has been so successfully and uniformly maintained since the commencement of the war, and to treat all the people who may be well disposed towards the British with justice and forbearance. Sir Frederick Roberts looks confidently towards the successful accomplishment of the object of the expedition, convinced as he is that all ranks are animated with the proud feeling that to them is entrusted the duty and privilege

of relieving their fellow-soldiers and restoring the prestige of the British army."

With his usual happy knack Lord Roberts had found exactly the words and sentiment in which to appeal to his men. They were plunging into the unknown, cut off from all communication from the outer world, liable at any moment to be fallen on and attacked by Ayoob Khan, whose victory would mean the flocking to his standard of great numbers, and even under the most favourable circumstances they were certain to meet with much discomfort and with many dangers on their journey. But at the other end was a garrison of British soldiers, appealing for relief, and here was a motive which struck an answering note in every heart. So, full of hope and enthusiasm, the force set out in the early dawn of an August morning, and the war-cry of the Sikhs, "Guru! Guru! Futteh Guru!" rang through the air, alternating with rounds of British cheers.

After the long halt at Sherpur, the men were not in a condition at once to accomplish great distances, and the General, knowing the heavy call he might have to make on them later, took them along at first at easy distances of about twelve miles or so a day, increasing to sixteen miles, he personally looking into every detail which might affect their comfort. Order and organisation were the watch-words of the force; nothing was left to chance; everything was thought out carefully beforehand, and as carefully carried through, down to the

exact place in camp of every camp-follower. Besides the 10,000 fighting men there were nearly 8000 of these camp-followers to be provided for, and over 11,000 animals, but so excellent were all the arrangements that no one failed to get his rations regularly.

By four o'clock each morning the force was on the move; a rest of ten minutes was given every hour, extended to twenty minutes or half-an-hour at regular intervals for meals; and about seven in the evening usually found them at a halting-place for the night. Each brigade took its turn at forming the rear-guard, on whom fell the wearisome duty of bringing all the stragglers, abandoned loads, and worn-out men into camp, a duty which became harder as the days went on and the foot-sore camp-followers fell out freely. The days were very hot and the nights very cold; water was hard to get; dust and sand storms were frequent; and the so-called roads were but rough and stony tracks.

Still the troops swung along cheerfully, officers and men alike in good spirits, ready to follow to the end a general who, at the close of the longest and hottest march, never failed to ride back, sometimes for miles, to meet the tired-out men with the good news that the camp was close at hand, and, on reaching Khelati Ghilzai, where the garrison was found to be safe, Roberts was able to telegraph a satisfactory account of his men, who had now

marched 225 miles. A message from Kandahar brought the news that the garrison there had plenty of food and could hold out, which enabled the General to promise his force a welcome day's rest, as he thanked them for the admirable manner in which they had hitherto executed the march. He added that, according to the latest accounts, the Afghan army was near Kandahar, where he hoped it might remain, so that the honour of relieving the British garrison might fall to the lot of his "magnificent troops." There were still nearly ninety miles to be covered before Kandahar could be reached, and Roberts was most unlucky in being laid low by a sharp attack of fever, which necessitated his being carried along, much to his own annoyance, for his wish was to share all the hardships of the march with his men. By August 27 they were in heliographic communication with Kandahar, and heard that, though Ayoob had not fled, he had raised the siege, and that the garrison was safe. But the force wanted something more than this. Far from being worn-out by the long march, they were ready for a fight, and their one desire was to meet Ayoob Khan with his large army in open battle. On August 31, having accomplished 313 miles, they entered Kandahar, Roberts with a great effort mounting his horse when he was within a mile of the citadel, that he might ride forward to meet General Primrose. There was a good deal of cheering on

the part of the garrison, who appeared to have been somewhat demoralised by the disaster, and to have shown anything but a resolute spirit of resistance.

A curious sight, too, awaited the bedraggled, dusty men who had made their way thither with such speed, for suddenly they came on the Wali Sher Ali, with other members of his family, drawn up on horseback and grouped picturesquely in the middle of the road, clad in magnificent attire and showing no signs of any distress or anxiety.

It did not take the cavalry, who went out on a reconnaissance, long to discover the whereabouts of Ayoob Khan, who was occupying a position on a steep ridge, well entrenched. The road to this he had made almost impossible to follow, and on the Baba Wali Kotal, he had planted his guns.

Roberts quickly resolved to follow out his old tactics, of threatening the enemy from one quarter and making the real attack from another; and on the morning of September 1st the last phase in the struggle began. From Kandahar the guns shelled the Baba Wali Kotal as if a frontal attack was to be made, and meanwhile Major-General Ross sent Generals Macpherson and Baker, with Highlanders and Goorkhas, to rush the village of Gundi Mulla Sahildad, which formed a strong position for the enemy, surrounded as it was by gardens and orchards. Once again Goorkhas and Highlanders raced each other in their desire to be first on the

spot, and won their way at the point of the bayonet, against the frenzied resistance of the Afghans, though at the cost of many valuable lives, including that of the colonel of the Seaforths. But with the greatest gallantry they pushed forward, carrying before them one position after another, until by afternoon the important villages of Pai Paiwal and Gundigan were also cleared and held. Suddenly the Highlanders, who had steadily pressed forward, found themselves faced by several thousands of the enemy, who, with their guns, were ready to make a final stand. "Highlanders, will you follow me if I give you a lead for those guns?" asked Major White of the Gordons, as he realised that an instant's delay would be dangerous.

Cheers were the answer given, and the pipers started playing as the men, splendidly backed up by Goorkhas and Pioneers, dashed forward, and under a heavy cross fire took the guns by storm.

The enemy wavered and broke, pursued by General Hugh Gough with his cavalry, and Colonel Money with half a battalion of the Sikhs; and General Ross, whose brigades had won so telling a victory in so short a time, stood in the deserted camp of Ayoob Khan, to be joined later by Roberts himself, who saw here the crowning point of his long, hazardous march. In a few hours the victorious Afghan army had been driven from their chosen position and utterly routed, leaving their guns and their camps in our hands, our losses being

comparatively small, four officers and thirty-six men killed, eleven officers and 198 men wounded.

Ill as he was, General Roberts would not spare himself for a moment during that eventful day, and when all was over, he rode round to each of the regiments in turn, to thank them personally for the splendid way in which they had fought; while each regiment in response greeted with hearty cheers the man who had led them on step by step to victory.

"Never," wrote an officer present, "can I forget those cheers, which showed the respect and confidence in which Roberts is held. His feelings on that evening must indeed have been enviable, and his good fortune delights every one." But it has been truly said that only a great defeat is a sadder thing to think of than a great victory, and though more than relieved at the turn affairs had taken, Roberts, worn-out by fever, and the ceaseless strain of the last few months, tells us that he was nearly unmanned at the sight of the dead bodies of his gallant soldiers, and could only say his words of thanks "with a very big lump in his throat."

Rarely has a general experienced in one campaign, incidents more varying and dramatic.

First, had been the successful advance into Afghan territory, followed by brilliant victories, the signing of the treaty of Gandamak, and crowned by the banquet which Lord Lytton had given at Simla, to "the hero of the Peiwar Kotal." Then had come the murder of Cavagnari, the hasty march on Kabul, the

stiff fights and the gallant conquests, which had brought him up to the ruined Residency, still smoking, a grim reminder of the murder done there. After that had followed days of breathless anxiety, when the British force had been obliged to remain on the defensive inside its entrenchments, attacked by a furious enemy in their thousands. Once more victory; and once more it had seemed that the work was done and that peace was about to flourish, when suddenly there came the news of the Kandahar disaster, succeeded by weeks of intense anxiety and strain. Then another heavy fight, and the loss of some who had been at his side through all, to sadden the moment of supreme victory.

Truly, it had been a campaign of many lights and shadows, but with the defeat of Ayoob Khan, peace seemed certain, for Abdur Rahman was daily making his power felt in a satisfactory manner, and gave evidence that in him had been found a strong ruler, who might be counted on as a useful and staunch ally.

There was now nothing more to keep the Kabul Field Force in Afghanistan, and as supplies were difficult to obtain round Kandahar, General Roberts decided to send his troops homewards without further delay. With a change of Government, his old friend and firm supporter, Lord Lytton, had resigned office, and the new Viceroy was Lord Ripon, who begged him to remain himself on the spot to assist in making the final settlement. This

he was quite ready to do, but his health broke down seriously, and it was evident that nothing short of a sea voyage, and a complete rest in England, would set him up again after the heavy strain laid upon him.

Saying farewell to the troops who had supported him so loyally, could not fail to be a real sorrow, in spite of the pleasant prospect which lay before him.

"Never," he has himself written, "had a commander been better served, and I shall never forget the feeling of sadness with which I said good-bye to the men who had done so much for me. I looked upon them all, native as well as British, as my valued friends. Riding through the Bolan Pass, I overtook most of the regiments of the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force, marching towards Sibi, thence to disperse to their respective destinations. As I parted with each corps in turn, its band played 'Auld Lang Syne,' and I have never since heard the memory-stirring air without its bringing before my eye the last view I had of the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force. I fancy myself crossing, and recrossing, the river which winds through the Pass; I hear the martial beat of the drums, and the plaintive music of the pipes; and I see Riflemen and Goorkhas, Highlanders and Sikhs, guns and horses, camels and mules, with the endless following of an Indian army, winding through the narrow gorges or over the interminable boulders."

Another aspect of Roberts during the latter part of the campaign has been given by an officer, who marched for the whole twenty-one days with his regiment, from Kabul to Kandahar.

"As one who actually walked the whole distance," he writes, "I can safely say it was extremely hard work, and could not possibly have been done except under a general like Sir Frederick Roberts, who was believed in and trusted by all ranks, and who inspired a determination to fall down rather than give in. The hardest marches were from Ghazni to Yergatta, the last three hours of which were through a blinding dust-storm; from Muker to Punjak—nineteen miles—a march without any water, except one muddy stream the whole distance; and from Khel-i-Akhund to Nobat, the weather on this day being like an Indian hot weather day. The work on the ranks was excessive. Men were either on piquet, or on some fatigue, every day, either before starting in the morning, or after arrival in camp. The chief cause of fatigue was, however, want of sleep. The force generally marched so early in the morning, and rear-guards got in so late, that men on this latter duty obtained very few hours rest. I consider it was simply the pluck of the men, inspired by the general's presence and encouragement, that pulled the force through."

From the moment he reached Simla, where an autograph letter from Queen Victoria was handed to him, General Roberts found himself fêted as a hero.

"Sir Frederick Roberts," said the Viceroy, "has achieved, what the commander-in-chief in India justly describes, as one of the most complete and successful operations of recent times. The Government of India appreciates the foresight which governed the preparation of the force at Kabul, the energy which conducted it to Kandahar, and the skill through which its operations were fitly crowned by the total defeat of the enemy against whom its movements had from the first been directed. The high, soldierly spirit, which animated this force throughout its ranks, formed the ample justification of the Government of India in sanctioning an enterprise, that could not have been prudently entrusted to a leader less able, or to troops less efficient, than Sir Frederick Roberts and the soldiers so worthy of his leading."

In England, the outburst of enthusiasm which greeted "the hero of Kandahar" was tremendous, and those croakers who had prophesied nothing but evil concerning the march, were now only too eager to join in the universal chorus of praise. The suspense and uncertainty which had prevailed during the weeks when no news was heard of the force, gave way to a feeling, first of relief at their safety, then of intense excitement, when the general himself appeared in their midst.

Roberts, while naturally pleased at the warmth of the welcome given to him, modestly explained that the march had been less perilous than the general

public supposed, as he had a large picked force on whom he could entirely rely, a definite object before him, admirable transport arrangements, and no resistance; while never once during the march had he or his troops been in such a critical position as they had been earlier in the campaign on their way through the Shutargardan Pass. But the "march of the ten thousand" appealed to the British public, and the man in the street declared it was the greatest performance of any British general since Waterloo!

Endless banquets and dinners were arranged in honour of the hero of Kandahar, and at one, that given by the Lord Mayor of London at the Mansion House, Roberts made a speech on the organisation of the army, which added greatly to the reputation he had won for himself as a soldier. Delivered simply and straightforwardly, it was an honest, common-sense speech, its object being to place his fellow-countrymen in possession of the truth about their army, and to do something for the soldiers who had done so much for him. There were three qualities, he declared, which had made the British army in the past, and were no less necessary to it at the present time—discipline, *esprit de corps*, and power of endurance; and of these, the greatest was *esprit de corps*, "that sensitive plant, which like other sentiments having their root in our common nature, plays as large and influential part in life as the dictates of reason itself."

For it was that which created the spirit of loyalty in a man towards his own corps, which prompted him to do much more than his bare duty. And this *esprit de corps* could only be fostered in the regimental system. To enlist men in one corps, and to transfer them to another as though they were mere machines, was sufficient in itself to defeat the whole object of a volunteer army. "Our army is a small one," he said, "almost absurdly small to meet the many demands made upon it. Above all things then it is necessary that the spirit and tone of that army should compensate for its numerical weakness."

He then went on to explain the disadvantages of the short service system, which substituted young soldiers for veterans. "These young soldiers may be, and probably are individually, as brave as their comrades of more mature age," he declared, "and as well able to fight where everything is *couleur de rose*. But I will never admit that young soldiers, or those new to each other, are as reliable in times of difficulty as old tried soldiers. It must be remembered that fighting is not the only demand made upon our soldiers. It is, of course, the main object to be kept in view in any system of training, but all, especially British soldiers, must possess great powers of endurance. Otherwise they are really worth nothing. What is it which causes the long casualty roll during a campaign? Not the losses in battle, but the steady, never-ceasing disease

brought about by insufficient and badly-cooked food, hard work, night duties, and by exposure to extremes of heat and cold. Against such trials only the strongest can bear up; and unless regiments are composed of men, full grown, and of fine stamina, our armies, in point of numbers weak at the best for the work they have to do, must dwindle away very rapidly when they take the field."

But for his veterans, he felt certain, that his force would have been annihilated at the Peiwar Kotal, and it was because he had with him tried men, not untried, untrained boys, that he had ventured on the march from Kabul to Kandahar. "If the short system is persisted in," he added, "it will be impossible for a British force ever to perform such a march again."

"The question of our army," he said in conclusion, "is a national one, and must be of as vital importance to one party of our countrymen as another. What we all want to get is the best material for our money, and what we shall all probably agree to, is, that nothing is so expensive as a bad article. . . . I crave pardon for having spoken at such length. But it has long been in my head to say to my countrymen what I have said to-night. These are trying times, times in which it behoves every Englishman to think of what is best for the country and the state. We have enemies without and within, and we must not hope to maintain the place we hold in the

world, unless we are prepared to maintain it alike by the wisdom of our counsels, and by the strength and valour of our arms. At such a time, it were little less than treason to know, or to believe, that there was a flaw in our armour, and not to call attention, clearly and earnestly, to the fact. This must be my apology. I have spoken warmly and strongly, because, had I not seized this great opportunity to do so, I feel that I should have failed in my duty, not only to the noble service to which I have the privilege to belong, but also to my country and my Queen."

Mr. Childers, the Secretary of State for War, who spoke later on in the evening, said he felt certain that General Roberts had struck the right key-note, and that his weighty words would be well considered by all who were responsible for the government of the army. And as a matter of fact, several of the most serious defects in the short service system were ultimately remedied, as the result of the telling indictment made against them by Sir Frederick Roberts in this famous Mansion House speech.

Roberts has consistently been the champion of the old soldier, by which he means a man of from five to twelve years' service; and in an article which he wrote later, bearing on this much debated subject, he summed up his own experience in words as vigorous as they are full of sound common sense. "The characteristics of young soldiers are to play

a winning game; to attack with dash where success seems probable; or even to stand up to superior forces where courage has not been damped by previous reverses, and faith in their leader remains unimpaired. Under such conditions they may even surpass their older comrades. But in times of danger and panic, when the bugle sounds the retire, when everything seems to be going against us, and when total rout can only be avoided by order and presence of mind, then it is that the old soldier element becomes of incalculable value. Without it a commander would indeed be badly off."

I have quoted these sentences, both from the speech and from the article, to show that Lord Roberts is something more than a leader of men in the field. All through his career "Thorough" might well have been his watchword, so persistently has he worked at all those details which, to the superficial observer, lie in the background, but to the really great general are the vital issues affecting the whole future of the troops under his command. To him, the men have never become mere machines, and there is no general of our own day who has appealed with such good results to those noblest qualities which he has ever sought to foster among his soldiers, or who has obtained from his men such satisfactory work.

CHAPTER XIV

RESTING ON HIS LAURELS

ONLY a few days after the Mansion House Banquet, the news reached England of a serious reverse in South Africa, where troubles had been brewing for some time. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that six hundred men, who occupied Majuba Hill under Sir George Colley, were driven from their position by two hundred Boers, after losing, as killed or wounded, more than a third of their number, their general himself being left among the dead on the heights. The nation smarted under the defeat, and the Government decided to take up a strong line. Reinforcements were hurriedly ordered out from England and Gibraltar, while from India were sent the pick of the regiments, including many of the famous Kabul-Kandahar Field Force. One name came uppermost to every mind, as the man to whom the supreme command in South Africa should be entrusted at this critical moment, and Mr. Childers submitted the name of Sir Frederick Roberts to the Queen. "Entirely approve; had thought of this myself," was her Majesty's answer.

General Roberts was still suffering from the

effects of his Indian fever and the heavy strain of the Afghan campaign, and this was an unexpected termination to the holiday he had hoped to spend with his wife and children. But he at once accepted the responsibility, and sailed on the 6th of March.

Arrived at Cape Town, he found that the Government had hurriedly, and weakly, changed its line of policy, and that peace was already being made, a peace which could only lead to more bitter enmity and misunderstanding before long. However, the mere presence of Roberts at the Cape was considered by the terrified Government as a possible source of irritation to the Boers, so his stay there only lasted one day, and he was sent back to England with as much haste as he had been called out. Naturally it was a disappointment, not only because of the time taken out of his all too short holiday, but also because he had little faith in a peace patched up so hastily.

"One cannot entirely prevent oneself from thinking over and deeply regretting, the grievous sacrifice of life and waste of property which might have been spared, had wiser counsels prevailed and a less timorous policy been favoured at the time," he said many years later, when once more he found himself in Cape Town, entrusted with the task of bringing to a conclusion the work he had been prevented from undertaking nearly twenty years before.

"And yet," he added with his usual cheery out-

look, "we must all recognise that the war of 1881 could not have had the far reaching results of this war, the benefits of which to South Africa will, I believe, be felt to be greater and greater as time goes on. It could not have welded the whole British Empire firmly together as this war has done, for the war of 1881 would have been fought entirely by regular troops, whereas this war has been brought to its termination, not by our regular army alone, but by the aid of the militia, the yeomanry, and the volunteers of Great Britain, as well as by the help of the admirable and workmanlike contingents furnished by South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and Ceylon, all fighting as brothers in arms under the dear old flag."

Once more back in England, Roberts busied himself in many different ways, and in the late summer was sent by the War Office, as its official representative, to the manœuvres of the German army. He was warmly welcomed by that fine old soldier the Emperor William, and by Von Moltke, both of whom paid him the highest compliments on his conduct of the Afghan war, while every opportunity was afforded him of studying the wonderful machinery of the army, which in Germany is brought to the highest pitch of perfection.

Before leaving India, he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Madras army; while

in England, however, he was offered the post of Quartermaster-General at the War Office.

"I have a great longing to take part in the administration of the army," he wrote to Mr. Childers, "and to be initiated into the workings of the War Office."

But in spite of this, he felt that he ought to go back to India, where there were endless army reforms to be carried out, and where his influence was strong. India had done much for him, and he was determined to repay the debt to the best of his ability. So in the late autumn of 1881 he sailed, and soon found ample scope for all his energies in his new sphere of work.

It quickly became clear to him, that the Madras army as a whole, owing to the years of peace and prosperity which it had enjoyed, was very much below the mark from a fighting point of view, and it naturally became his first determination to bring it up to a really efficient standard, for none knew better than he, that only in the days of peace can an army be made fit for its work in war time. Essentially a practical man, ready to take material at hand and use it to the best advantage, Roberts, noticing the good average of intelligence among the Madras soldiers, determined to develop their shooting powers, and accordingly encouraged musketry training in every way, he himself, with his staff, setting an example, by forming a shooting team, which entered for matches at the various rifle meet-

ings. He developed, too, the camps of exercise, which were in reality manœuvres, and of the utmost importance, though here again his hands were often tied, through the difficulty of getting anything adequate, in the way of money grants.

But it was not only the making of a soldier into a good fighting machine which interested Roberts, he had other and higher objects than that. To him, the army was a noble profession, and it has been his consistent aim to raise the whole tone of the men who formed it, to draw out their best qualities, and to give them every opportunity of earning for themselves that self-respect out of which springs all other qualities worth possessing. Discipline of course is necessary to a soldier, but there is a vast difference between the discipline which restricts and irritates him at every turn, and the discipline which exists as a useful incentive. From the time, when in horror, he had watched the public flogging of some men belonging to his battery, Roberts had gone on the principle, that constant punishment hardened a soldier, and made him indifferent as to the character he bore in the regiment. It was a case of giving a dog a bad name and hanging him. So one of his first acts as Commander-in-Chief in Madras, was to go into the whole question of the punishments meted out to young soldiers, and to insist that leniency and gentle handling should take the place of cut and dried court-martial sentences.

"I urged," he says, "that in the first two or three

years of a soldier's service, every allowance should be made for youth and inexperience." More than that, he insisted on many inducements being held out to the men who kept their names clear of the defaulters' list, and granted them privileges such as passes and more freedom generally. These were greatly appreciated, and produced such excellent results, that after a preliminary trial, Roberts to his great satisfaction was able to extend the list of concessions. So nearly four years went by, in one sense uneventful years to a fighting general, but giving him a welcome rest, and the equally welcome opportunity of devoting himself to the training and organisation of his army.

In 1885 dark clouds began to gather again round Afghanistan. Russia had been steadily advancing her boundaries, and there was every reason to suspect that she had still further designs on the territory of the Amir. Lord Dufferin, who was Viceroy, was quick to recognise the danger, and while prepared to strain every nerve in averting war with Russia, was determined that if war had to be, it should find the Indian Government and the Indian army prepared. Preparations were hurried forward for the mobilisation of two army corps, the first of which Roberts was to command, and a conference between the Viceroy and the Amir took place at Rawal Pindi, to which place Roberts also moved. It looked as if another crisis was imminent. Russia evidently aimed at occupying Herat, and with this

end in view steadily pushed forward her boundaries. The Amir, though anxious to be friendly up to a certain point with Russia, had no idea of seeing his possessions encroached upon, and wanted assistance from the British Government in the form of arms and money. Any further support he seemed disinclined for, and though full of protestations as to the cordiality of his own feelings towards England, he declared that his people being ignorant, were still very suspicious. But he and the Viceroy were, however, agreed that the Russian encroachments must cease, and Lord Lytton supplied him liberally with funds, guns, and ammunition.

"May your Government endure, and your honour increase," said Abdur Rahman in farewell. "I have been greatly pleased and gratified by the sight of the British army. I hope, and am certain, that the friendship now existing between us will last for ever."

On the whole the interview was satisfactory, and Roberts was especially delighted at the fine spirit of loyalty to England, shown by the native rulers and by the native soldiers. It was quite evident that, should war be inevitable, Russia would get no support either in India or Afghanistan. The Government at home, too, took a decided line, refusing to yield a point, and Russia came to the conclusion that, on this occasion, she was not prepared to decide the question by force of arms. So for the time being the crisis was averted.

It was just at this period that Roberts was appointed Commander-in-Chief in India, and in many ways it was a satisfactory moment for him to take over the responsibilities of this important position. Whenever the question of reform in the Indian army had cropped up, it had always been checkmated by the difficulty of getting the necessary money, and there had been a continuous struggle between soldier and civilian rulers, the former demanding the money, without which, they declared, the army could not be made efficient, the latter only granting the minimum amount. The scare of a great war with Russia, and the weak points in the Indian army which had shown themselves when it came to the point of mobilising two army corps, had the effect of unloosing in some degree the purse-string, so that Sir Frederick Roberts was allowed a much freer hand, and was able to organise a camp of exercise on a very large scale, in which 35,000 men took part.

All-important in the eyes of the new Commander-in-Chief was the frontier question, rendered still more so as the Russian policy became evident. A committee had been formed under Sir Donald Stewart, to consider how the frontier might best be made secure against attack, the members of which had urged the need for ample fortifications. Roberts took a somewhat different view. Fortifications, he urged, could only be erected at a great cost, and though a certain number were necessary,

carried out on a large scale, they might easily become a danger, for if turned by the enemy the result would be the locking up of a great body of troops. It was far more important, in his opinion, to spend the money in making perfect the lines of communication, in laying out roads and railways, and in making such thorough preparations, that at the first danger-signal troops could be moved forward quickly and easily. "A mobile and a well-equipped field army is an infinitely more important factor than the most powerful system of defences," he declared.

His great experience in all frontier matters, and the excellent common-sense which never failed him, resulted in his suggestions being acted on to a very large extent, and, in his own words, "I had the supreme satisfaction of knowing, seven years later, when I gave up my command of the army in India, that I left our North-West Frontier secure, so far as it was possible to make it so, hampered as we were by want of money."

Another pressing matter to which Roberts devoted very close attention, was the reorganisation of the transport department. Past experience had shown him how the movements of troops had been hindered and handicapped by the weakness of the transport arrangements, and he knew that unless some great alteration in the existing state of things was made, it would be useless to dream of an army corps which could start without delay when re-

quired and move quickly towards its goal. Into all the details of the new scheme the Commander-in-Chief entered, and, thanks to his practical experience, the whole transport service was put on an excellent working basis. "No scheme," said the Viceroy, "of a similar description has, in my belief, been ever worked out with greater thoroughness, in more detail, and with clearer apprehension of the ends to be accomplished."

Needless to say, Roberts, now that the full power lay in his hands, left no stone unturned in his efforts to improve the whole position of the private soldier. "In everything he did, he showed so thoroughly that he knew and understood the men," said an army chaplain. "And all his schemes were so practical."

Drunkenness, always one of the chief temptations of a soldier, was even more of a danger in India than elsewhere, on account of the climate. And yet each regiment possessed its canteen, in which drinking went on to an alarming extent, and which offered every inducement to the men to spend their spare time there getting through one quart after another. Roberts was fully alive to the fact that most of the men would be none the worse for a moderate amount of beer each day; what he wanted to stop was the steady drinking which went on, and his plan was the wise one of checking an evil by putting something good in its place. So he started in every

regiment and battery a Soldiers' Institute—that is to say, a soldiers' club, run on the best lines, where the men could read their books and papers, play their games, and buy all those little "extras" in the way of food and sweet things, of which they are so fond; where they could, too, get a glass of beer with their supper if they wanted it, but where no sitting down to drink steadily was allowed. Nothing could have been more satisfactory than the result, and only those who know something of barrack life with all its temptations, can realise the blessing which a well-managed institute is to the men, and how genuinely it is appreciated. Although the formation of Soldiers' Institutes was a piece of temperance work of the most practical kind, Roberts did not stop at this, but interested himself in setting on foot an active and useful temperance society. He saw the advantage of having a single strong society, officially acknowledged, instead of a number of little societies, one often at rivalry with the other on some point of detail, though at one in the main object. Moreover, Roberts approved of temperance as well as of total abstinence, and was not anxious to force the pledge on the men, though he believed that in many cases they would gladly become teetotallers, if there happened to be in their regiment some society to which they could belong, and which would bind them together. It was a work of some difficulty to form into one associa-

tion, men of different religious creeds, and of widely divergent views on the temperance question; but here once again the Commander-in-Chief triumphed, thanks to his ready tact and the affectionate confidence he inspired. The Army Temperance Association became a fact; a special room was given over to its members in every Soldiers' Institute; it was made at once a regimental affair, and its influence soon was widely felt for good. Roberts has never allowed his interest in this excellent association to wane; as one of his first public acts in Bloemfontein, during the South African war, was to preside at a large meeting called together in its name, and later, as Commander-in-Chief in England, he has always made a point of attending the meetings of its executive committee.

The care of the sick in military hospitals in India was also a subject which lay very near to his heart, and into this work Lady Roberts threw herself most energetically; her special object, and one in which she succeeded, being to get out from England a number of well-trained nurses, able to cope with the many serious cases of enteric fever, which could only be pulled through by skilled nursing.

All this work, in addition to his purely military duties, and his many schemes for improving every branch of the service, to say nothing of social claims, which play an important part at Simla, meant a very busy life for the Commander-in-Chief, especially when a short campaign in Burma necessi-

tated his going there for some months, to organise the body of mounted police, whom he considered would best keep the peace there when once the bands of dacoits then raiding the country had been conquered. But Roberts had the knack of getting through an immense amount of work at apparently very little cost to himself. Though always busy, he never seemed hurried, and he led a regular, simple life, which found him ready to undertake each task as it came. Then, too, the charm of his manner, and the kindliness of his nature, had its effect on every one with whom he came in contact, and made it the delight of every subordinate officer to relieve the "Chief" of all the work and anxiety possible.

Still, the strain of nearly forty years in India, under such circumstances, could not fail to tell, and bound as he was by ties of old association and real affection to the country which had seen all his service as a soldier, Sir Frederick Roberts looked forward to employment in England. A letter from the Secretary of State for War, suggesting to him that he should become the next Adjutant-General at the War Office, gave him great pleasure, as it seemed that here lay the realisation of his wish to learn the War Office side of army life. A second letter assured him that his appointment had been approved by the Cabinet, and that shortly he would be summoned home to take it up. But this was followed by an unlooked-for blow, though indirectly

it was a testimony to the great confidence felt in Roberts, both by the Government in India and at home, for he was told that as it was deemed most important he should not leave India at this moment, he was requested to accept the command there for two extra years. Under the circumstances he could not but consent, though the disappointment was a very real one to him.

Then came another period of hard work, and fresh efforts on the part of the Commander-in-Chief to make "the army in India as perfect a fighting machine as it was possible to make it," the native regiments in particular claiming a large share of his attention. Even with his unequalled experience at his back, he found it difficult to carry out many of his ideas and reforms, for most people considered that one native soldier was just the same as another, while Roberts knew the vast difference in value between the fighting men of the north, and the less hardy races of the south.

"I was in despair," he wrote, "at not being able to get people to see the matter with my eyes, for I knew that nothing was more sure to lead to disaster, than to imagine that the whole Indian army as it was then constituted, could be relied on in time of war. General Chesney fortunately shared my opinions, and as Lords Dufferin and Lansdowne trusted us, we were able to do a great deal towards increasing the efficiency of the Indian army."

Various small expeditions took place, all of them satisfactory; but on the other hand there were signs that Abdur Rahman, having made his own position secure through our assistance, was inclined to give trouble and entirely to over-estimate his own importance and power. Roberts was most anxious to meet him, and the Amir professed to be delighted at the idea. At the last moment, however, when all arrangements had been made, he pleaded ill-health, and so the interview never took place; for the moment had now come when Roberts was to leave India for good. In appreciation of his splendid work, he had been given a peerage, and it had been again suggested that he should continue to hold his present post a little longer, but he felt that change and rest were necessary to him now, and that he could not face another period of heavy work in an Indian climate.

The sorrow, which was universally shown when it was known that he was about to leave, was the best testimony to his work during the forty-one years he had spent in India. While faithfully and resolutely doing his duty as a soldier, he had won the affection of all classes of people. Europeans, Hindus, Mohammedans, and Sikhs, soldiers and civilians, joined in bidding him a regretful farewell. "We approach your excellency," said the Mohammedans, "with eyes tear-bedimmed, but a face smiling. The departure of a noble

and well-beloved general like yourself from our country, is in itself a fact that naturally fills our eyes with tears. What could be more sorrowful than this, our farewell to an old officer and patron of ours, who has passed the prominent portion of his life in our country, developed our young progeny to bravery and regular soldiery, decorated them with honours, and created them to high titles."

"We pray to the Father of all good that He may shower His choicest blessings upon you," echoed the Hindus of the Punjab; "that He may give you many years of happy life, a life which has done so much for the Queen-Empress's dominions, and may do yet more."

So, amid a wonderful outburst of good feeling, Lord Roberts bade good-bye to the land to which he had devoted unsparingly all his best years, and in which, by dint of sheer hard work and devotion to duty, he had won for himself the reputation of being the greatest general of his day.

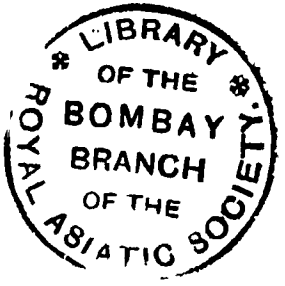
On arriving in England, he was welcomed enthusiastically, and became the hero of the hour. To the general public he was "Bobs," and though he had never done a day's soldiering in England, he was as well known and as popular as if he had lived all his life there. And yet there was a general feeling that with India, his days of active work had ceased, and it was urged that,

having had nothing but Indian experience, it was not desirable that he should be made Commander-in-Chief of the whole British army, Nor did the Liberal Government then in power endorse his forward frontier policy. Altogether, it seemed as if cheers and banquets were to represent the sum total of a nation's gratitude. Eventually he was given the post of Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, and being an Irishman, at once won the affections of his warm-hearted countrymen, who proudly claimed him as their own, and declared it was the good old Irish blood in him which had made him the fine fighting man he was.

The contrast between India and Dublin was great, and in many ways life in the Irish capital was a delightful and restful change, bringing with it more leisure and fewer responsibilities. But Lord Roberts was of far too active a nature not to make plenty of work for himself wherever he might be, and far too keen a soldier not to be always on the lookout for opportunities. In Ireland, as in India, he set himself to improve and develop the shooting of his men, and the manœuvres he held there showed unmistakably the master-mind which lay at the back of the plan. Nevertheless, strange to say, he only watched the manœuvres on Salisbury Plain unofficially, "as a visitor who had come there because his interest was too great to let him stay away." For he had been offered no command during the time.

But the moment was at hand when everything was to be swept on one side in the face of England's danger and England's need; and then it was that the nation called for Roberts, as the one man who, though old in years, was young and vigorous in mind and body, still,

> "Ever a Fighter
> And ready for one fight more."



CHAPTER XV

THE CALL TO ARMS

THE outbreak of the war in South Africa in the autumn of 1899 is still so fresh in our memory that it is unnecessary to recapitulate the events which led up to it. Suffice it to say that, at the moment of the declaration of war, the Boers had every advantage in their hands. The Orange Free State, thanks to Steyn and Kruger's secret service money, had definitely thrown in its lot with the Transvaal, and their united armies could not have numbered less than 70,000 fighting men, all of whom had been waiting for the war signal to be given by the field cornet of their district. Their Mauser rifles were new and of the best; they had plenty of guns of the most powerful kind; each man mounted himself on a pony sturdy and well used to the country; there was no uniform to be thought of and supplied, for the Boer disdained uniform, and wore instead the strong corduroy which his womenkind had prepared for him beforehand. The women, too, took the work of feeding the army on themselves until such time as the government had organised a supply department. Thus there was no reason for delay—such an army could be

called into being at a very few days' notice. President Kruger had known all along that war it must be, and he had only dallied until his arrangements were complete. Peace, if by any means peace were possible—war only as a last resource—this had been the policy of the British Government, and therefore anything like active preparations on our part had been discountenanced, lest these should seem like threats.

As early as July, Natal, certain that war was imminent, had strongly pressed for more troops, and the garrison there had been strengthened; but, all told, the British force in South Africa at the end of September was but little over 20,000, and this force had to be divided between Natal and Cape Colony. The Boer generals knew full well that not for a month at earliest, after the declaration of war, could reinforcements from England arrive; everything, therefore, was in their favour. It was for them to choose where the fighting should take place, and at what point the fighting should begin. With this start of three weeks, and the fact that they were to fight in their own country against an army which had to be brought, with all its equipment, thousands of miles across the sea, the enemy had an enormous advantage from the beginning, and this they were not slow to use.

The British Government apparently failed to recognise the strength of the steadfast, organised resistance they would have to face. Utterly inadequate

as was our force in Natal, it was further weakened by being divided, the greater part of it being in Ladysmith, under the command of Sir George White, while about four thousand men were at Dundee, under Sir Penn Symons, their object being to protect the coalfields and bar the road and railway leading south. The intention was to wait on the defensive, until Buller arrived with such reinforcements as would enable them to strike a blow; but the weakness of this plan and of this arrangement of troops, lay in the fact that it did not take into consideration the possibility of the Boers advancing on one of these positions, neither of which was at all suitable for purposes of defence. Over confidence on our part, and utter ignorance of what the Boer could, and would do, as a soldier, caused the many disasters which crowded upon us one after the other, and which all the magnificent gallantry of our troops could not avert. And while it is easy to blame those in authority, it is well to remember, first, that this supreme self-confidence is the weak side of the English characteristic inability to believe in defeat, a trait which has saved us as a nation in more than one crisis; and, secondly, that as in times of peace no Boer army existed, it was extremely difficult to gauge its strength or its powers until we had tested them by bitter experience.

The Boers at once took the offensive, and on the night of October 19 they seized Talana Hill, which overlooked Dundee, and began to shell Symons's

little force. So long as they remained there the position at Dundee was an impossible one; their guns must at all costs be dislodged, and, true to British traditions, our soldiers stormed the kopje. But it was deadly work, and though sheer courage won the day, as with fixed bayonets, and exultant cheers, our men gained the hill and drove the Boers from their stronghold, the price paid in lives was a heavy one. Symons himself was mortally wounded, after having faced every danger with his men.

"You are fine fellows," he had told them proudly, just before he fell.

And indeed any general might have been proud of the officers and men who, undaunted by the heavy fire, had forged their way inch by inch up Talana Hill. But more than fifty brave hearts lay still for ever, and 150 men were wounded. Worst of all, the victory so hardly won was of little real use, for just as our guns got into a position from whence they could have shelled the retreating enemy with telling effect, the white flag went up. Our firing ceased, and in perfect safety the Boers rode out of range and escaped.

Colonel Yule, now in command, realised that to remain in his present position with so small a force was only to court disaster, and though retreat is a hateful word to an English soldier, especially when it meant, as in this case, leaving behind a dying general and many comrades, it was obviously his wisest plan to join hands with the main body at

Ladysmith. The risk was great and his men were tired, but the risk of remaining where they stood was greater. And so, reluctantly but resolutely, the hungry, worn-out force set out to accomplish seventy miles over a rough road, with the enemy on every side. But accomplish it they did, and well-earned, indeed, were the cheers which greeted the Dundee column as, mud-stained and exhausted, they entered Ladysmith.

Sir George White had not remained inactive with his Ladysmith force. On the day following the fight at Talana, every man who could be spared from Ladysmith had been sent out to General French, and a determined attack had been made on the Boer position at Elandslaagte. The splendid courage of our men, who struggled up the hillside in drenching rain, once more gained the day; and though our losses were heavy, we had captured guns and prisoners, besides having shown the Boers what British infantry could do. It was on this occasion that the Imperial Light Horse, that fine volunteer regiment of Uitlanders, who were fighting for all they prized most dearly, first won for themselves the great reputation they held throughout the campaign.

But despite the victory, there could be no rest for the force. The safety of Yule's column depended upon its not being attacked by the enemy, and this could only be prevented by the enemy being engaged elsewhere. So at Rietfontein, White,

though he made no attempt at drawing them from their position, kept the Boers employed until he knew that Yule was safe, and then he too, with his hard-worked men, fell back on Ladysmith. The first week's warfare was now over, and it was impossible to judge with whom the real advantage lay. When it came to sheer fighting, we had twice driven the Boers from their positions, but beyond the fact of accomplishing this, we had gained but little. When driven from one position, they fell back on another, probably equally strong, and they had practically forced us into Ladysmith, while they held the greater part of the country in the north of the colony. What was to be the next move? Critics, after the event, declare that White should have waited entrenched in Ladysmith till the troops, now on the seas, could be landed at Durban. But White had been trained in Afghanistan, and had learnt to love dashing tactics which had never failed to tell against the easily demoralised tribesmen.

With the Boers it was different; theirs was the dogged determination which could not readily be demoralised, and this was one of the first lessons our generals had to learn. Of the various alternatives open to him, White decided boldly to attack the enemy, for if, as he believed it would turn out, he could break up the main Transvaal army now gathering round Ladysmith, he would clear the way for the army under Buller, which must be

on the spot within a fortnight. The attack was made, and it failed. White once more fell back on Ladysmith with his troops, none of whom at first realised the full extent of the day's disaster. For it was not till later that they knew how the Gloucesters and Irish Fusiliers had been cut off; had been separated from their ammunition by a stampede of the mules in the ammunition carts; had been, by some extraordinary mistake, unable to communicate with the general; and finally, having fought doggedly against the enemy who surrounded them till their last cartridges had been spent, had surrendered with the utmost reluctance, and only when it was evident that nothing but useless loss of life could be gained by holding out further.

The whole affair was a terrible disaster, and a great gloom hung over England when the news reached home.

It was clear that the struggle was going to be a much fiercer one than any one had imagined, and not for many a long day was the cloud which overhung us as a nation to be lifted. Mafeking and Kimberley were already cut off and besieged; now the same fate awaited the garrison at Ladysmith. Here and there was a ray of light, as when the sailors, undaunted by any difficulties, arrived in the very nick of time with their naval guns, which were more than a match for the Boer artillery. But otherwise the outlook was gloomy.

All hopes were centered on Sir Redvers Buller, who landed in Cape Town on October 31, slightly in advance of the "fifty thousand horse and foot," which, in those early days, had been thought an ample force for the task. He found a serious state of things awaiting him. Cape Colony was in a ferment of excitement and apprehension; the Free Staters might cross the border to invade it at any moment, and with the main army shut up in Ladysmith, barely six thousand troops were available. This much, at least, of good fortune helped us at the time; that the enemy failed to take advantage of their strength and of our weakness. Had they been bold and dashing, the results in those early days would have been still more disastrous for us. The original plan had been for Buller to march with his full force through the Free State right on Pretoria, but this was out of the question now that the Boers had obtained so good a start; and the policy of dividing the forces was decided on, as seeming to be the best, the only alternative. To clear the way to Ladysmith, and set free the troops beleaguered there, was in itself an undertaking needing every one of the 50,000 troops available, especially when these had to deal with an enemy who could move quickly, while they were hampered by having an insufficient number of mounted men, and few guns.

The greatest of all mistakes in the war was at the commencement, when we entirely under-

estimated the fighting power of the Boers, and sent out a quarter of the men necessary. Until this mistake was realised, and rectified, nothing but humiliation and defeat awaited us. It is true that many other mistakes and blunders were committed which made the situation worse than it need have been, and which ended in great and useless sacrifice of life; and in England we had to wake up to face the unpleasant fact, that while our soldiers were as full of grit and mettle as ever, their leaders were wofully lacking in the power to lead.

But the real blame for the reverses which followed one after another, must be once more ascribed to our fatal self-confidence as a nation, for we must remember that the Government and the War Office are but the nation's representatives.

The history of the next few weeks is still fresh, and as I am only concerned with that part of the campaign which affects Lord Roberts, I must hasten on, with a bare mention of the week's fighting under Lord Methuen, who was marching to the relief of Kimberley, a period which included the battles of Belmont, Graspan, and the Modder River, and which cost over a thousand men in killed and wounded without seriously demoralising the enemy. We had driven them back, it is true; we had stormed and carried kopjes magnificently, but want of cavalry, want of guns, and want of accurate knowledge as to the country itself, and the covert it afforded, had

greatly minimised any advantages which had been gained.

Then had come the terrible night attack at Magersfontein, in which fell a thousand men, the majority of them the Highlanders, who had been literally sent right up to the jaws of death in the darkness. It was another "disaster," and before the extent of the defeat had been fully realised at home, while we were still stunned by the length of the casualty lists, there followed the tidings that General Gatacre had failed in his attack on Stormberg, partly because he had not enough men, and those at his disposal were tired out, but chiefly because the simplest precautions in the way of scouting had not been taken, and the Boers lay hidden, waiting only to open fire till their foe fell into their hands.

All this was bad enough, but still we waited on with a hope which amounted to something very like the old confidence. Buller had yet to move, and the blow he would strike must surely be so strong, so conclusive, as to redeem all the mistakes which had been made, and turn the tide of failure at last. But the news, when it came, was worse than anything that had been dreamt of.

Buller had made his first attempt to relieve Ladysmith by a direct frontal attack on the Boers, whose position was tremendously strong, and the attempt had utterly failed. The killed and wounded numbered nearly nine hundred; several of our guns

had fallen into the enemy's hands, and nothing whatever in the way of advantage had been gained, except the bitter experience that our tactics must be completely altered unless our armies were to be covered with disgrace. Here, as on all other occasions, the gallantry of the men left nothing to be desired. The gunners, ordered to within seven hundred yards of the enemy's trenches, stood on an unprotected spot, a mark for the most destructive fire. They could not work their guns, nor could they move them, for though one attempt after another was made to bring up teams, it always ended in horses and men being killed. The only son of Lord Roberts was among those who fell in an heroic attempt to save the guns by galloping down with teams of horses under that deadly fire. Yet the gunners were as calm and steady as if neither danger nor death existed. By their guns they stood, defending them till all hope of defence was over, and then they fell at their posts faithful unto death.

That such brave lives should have been sacrificed,' made the sense of defeat all the more bitter to every English man or woman who read the story.

Black indeed was the Christmastide of 1899. Yet never, perhaps, did England show herself so truly a great nation as at that moment. From the Continent there arose a chorus of vindictive delight at the humiliation of the proud little

country who seemed to have come face to face with her dark moment. But our enemies knew little of the tough character of Britain's sons, who are braced to action by defeat, and whose determination only increases with every difficulty which confronts them. There was sorrow in England indeed, but there was no shrinking or shrieking. Mistakes had undoubtedly been made; we had thought ourselves strong and prepared, and we had found instead weak spots in many places; even the man in the street could criticise freely and fairly the blunders which were all too apparent.

But this was not the moment for reproach. The day of reckoning would come afterwards, when the work had been finished. This was the moment for strong united action.

The whole world was to see, that if England stood alone she still stood secure, and with her children from every part of the globe at her side, she did not fear the final issue.

Her answer to the world was magnificent. She had but to speak the word and her sons in their thousands sprang to her aid. The old fighting instinct of the race was as strong as ever, and whatever number of volunteers was asked for, the men were forthcoming within a few hours. Never had such enthusiasm, such deep emotions swept over our land, as in this time of crisis; never were greater sacrifices more readily made both for country and for cause.

It was one thing, however, to send out men. But something more was needful.

These two hundred thousand soldiers needed a leader, and there was one name uppermost in every mind. When the hastily summoned Defence Committee called on Lord Roberts to go out in supreme command with Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff, they voiced the desire of the whole nation. It was but a few hours since Roberts had heard the worst from South Africa; his boy had died of the wounds received at Colenso. "It is God's will," he said, as he braced himself for the future.

Nothing but England's claim weighed with him in this hour.

Two days before Christmas he sailed. Round Waterloo Station an enormous crowd had gathered to bid him good-bye and God-speed; on the platform itself stood Royal Princes, Cabinet Ministers, with many distinguished soldiers and civilians.

And at the sight of that little white-haired man, with his lined face, and his bright eyes, his well-knit upright figure, fresh hope came to the nation.

The crowds cheered him with an intensity of feeling hitherto unknown to the average undemonstrative Englishman, and it was amid this thunder of cheers that the train steamed out of the station: while, in bitter contrast to this send-off, of which any man might be justly proud,

the newspaper boys in the streets shouted the latest war news, which included one line, "Burial of Lieutenant Roberts." Surely this was the greatest moment of an eventful life, and rarely has a man so entirely risen above every consideration save that of pure patriotism. For it must be remembered that in the past, South Africa had proved itself the grave of more than one firmly established reputation, and many an old soldier asked himself, "What if it proves so also to Roberts?" Yet he took the risk, just as he took the responsibility.

At Gibraltar, Lord Roberts was joined by Lord Kitchener, the soldier who had made his reputation by sheer force of merit, in Egypt, and who was known to be a master organiser, a man who refused to be baffled of the object he had in view. Tall, silent, stern and resolute, he was in every way a contrast to his genial, kindly-faced chief, but the combination was an excellent one. "Delighted to serve in any capacity under Lord Roberts," had been Kitchener's telegram in reply to the one proposing him as the Chief of Staff; and the story goes that, later on in the campaign, some one asked him if he had ever said "that he was so anxious to serve under Lord Roberts, that he would willingly go out to clean his boots if no other staff job could be found for him"? "I don't remember having said these words; but I will say them now!" is the answer reported to have been made by Lord Kitchener. And the sentiment

contained in the story is certainly true, if the actual words are not, for never was there a more loyal or indefatigable Chief of Staff.

On January 10th, Cape Town was reached, and Lord Roberts found there a state of things critical in the extreme. Among the Cape colonists were many who were openly disloyal, many more whose attitude was uncertain, and whose professed loyalty had not been equal to the strain of these past weeks. To avert an open outbreak there was of the utmost importance, and Roberts decided that his first move would be on the Orange Free State, with the twofold object of relieving the pressure on Ladysmith and Kimberley, and of preventing the Free Staters from joining hands with the disloyal Cape colonists.

But before any advance could be made, there was much for two such practical and searching organisers as Roberts and Kitchener to do. At present little organisation and great confusion prevailed, and among the many mistakes of the campaign, none stood out more clearly than the fact that all our operations had been handicapped by the want of mounted troops who could move quickly and easily. Plenty of such troops were available and on the spot, but they had not been used as they might have been, and this was the first mistake which Roberts set himself to remedy. He saw at once what splendid fighting

material could be made out of regiments formed of South African colonials. They knew the country, they knew Boer tactics, and, above all, they were fighting to protect their own homes. They were not, perhaps, perfect in their drill, or disciplined to move as if by machinery. They were what they professed to be, "irregular cavalry."

But Roberts never let red-tape stand in his way, and at once realised the value of these men who were eager to fight to the death, and who were a little sore at the want of encouragement they had received. With perfect tact he handled them. He formed a division composed entirely of Cape colonials, and gave them Colonel Brabant, one of their own most popular and able officers, as their general. At once the colonials fell under the spell of this Commander-in-Chief. To them, as to the British soldiers, he became the "Bobs" they adored, the man they would serve under and follow, through thick and thin. Nearly twenty thousand men in all did Cape Colony give, and splendid was the work they performed...

But if the army was to be made more mobile, a perfectly organised transport department was a necessity, so that columns need not be delayed or held back from making movements far away from the railway by want of supplies, and it was to the question of oxen, mules, and waggons that Roberts, with his energetic Chief of Staff, next devoted himself. Until the transport had been

set on a satisfactory basis, he knew full well that no effective advance could be made, and so patiently, the two generals remained at Cape Town, immersed in work of which the public knew or understood but little, yet work which alone made possible the brilliant successes in the near future.

From the actual seat of war the news was as bad as it could be. Buller's second attempt to cross the Tugela had failed. Spion Kop had been taken, indeed, and held for a few hours, at a cost of forty per cent. of the brave men who had fought their way up the steep sides, under a fire from which they had no protection; and then the position had been abandoned. It was considered impossible to take guns to the top; and without guns there, to wage war against the Boer artillery which worked relentlessly and accurately, it seemed to the man left unexpectedly in command, that to hold the hill would only mean more terrible slaughter and give no great point of advantage. Bravest of the brave himself, he dreaded leaving four thousand men exposed to that ceaseless fire on a hill which could not afford cover to more than a quarter of that number, and he withdrew his troops. "Better six battalions safely down the hill, than a mop up in the morning," was his remark. It was a great blow; for though Ladysmith was making an heroic defence, and refused even to send out anything but plucky and hopeful reports, it was certain that the garrison there was in sore straits. The foe

without and fever within formed a hard combination to face, added to the terrible disappointment of knowing the relieving force to be close at hand, yet foiled in every effort to advance. After Spion Kop, even Buller doubted if the relief could be accomplished save at such a loss of life as to mean too great a sacrifice. But Roberts was firm. Whatever the cost, he telegraphed to Buller, Ladysmith must be relieved. Honour demanded it, and he knew the troops would not fail, hard as the task might be.

The same day on which he sent that telegram he left Cape Town secretly at night, having made his plans and completed his organisation. His policy was a bold one, and attended with a good deal of risk, for it meant moving with all the available troops to the relief of Kimberley, and then carrying on the fight in the enemy's country by marching on Bloemfontein. Kimberley must be relieved by the end of February, he said, and though he recognised the danger of withdrawing most of the troops from Cape Colony at that moment, he felt convinced that the time for inaction was over, and that the best chance of safety for the colony lay in his being able to score a great success. Confident that his troops would be equal to all demands, and satisfied that the right policy lay in transferring the operations from the country chosen by the enemy to a country more suitable to ourselves, he set out so secretly that hardly a person realised he had gone. But

the terse words cabled to England: "Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener have left Cape Town, their destination being unknown," told an anxious nation that a new chapter in the war was about to begin —a chapter awaited with deep suspense, though with a sense of hopefulness which refused to be repressed.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE WAY TO BLOEMFONTEIN

On the evening of February 8th, Lord Roberts arrived at Lord Methuen's camp on the Modder River, and was welcomed by rounds of cheers from the men, who held that "Bobs and luck went hand in hand." As usual, he grasped the situation, and met it just in the way which appealed to his troops. The Highland Brigade were still smarting under the memory of Magersfontein, and to them he made a cheery little speech, telling them he had never campaigned without Highlanders yet, and would be very sorry to do so now; that in India and Afghanistan the Highlanders had helped to make him, and that once more he trusted to them in the long and arduous march which lay before them.

His words were enough, and the Highlanders felt that the word "disaster" no longer existed.

To all the other troops gathered there, who had suffered so heavily and fought so sturdily in trying to carry out the old and useless tactics of making direct frontal attacks on strong positions, he had those words of encouragement and praise, which never fail to produce a great effect on bodies of men. They had done well in the past, he told

them, and they would do well in the future. Though some stiff work lay in front of them, he felt certain of victory at the end. Altogether he brought fresh hope and new life to the men who had been sorely tried, and the message sent to Kimberley the next night had no uncertain sound. It simply said: "We are coming."

Roberts had in his main army four infantry divisions, one cavalry division, some mounted infantry, and 120 guns, in all about 34,000 men, and on the night of February 10th, one train after another left Modder River Camp, carrying the troops to some place of concentration, though exactly where, was only known to a very few.

So much depended on secrecy. Hitherto the Boers had known of every British move as soon as it had been decided upon, and had forestalled it accordingly, hence the caution, and hence, too, the feigned moves ordered by Lord Roberts to give the impression that he was making direct for Bloemfontein. In the early hours of the morning of February 12 the cavalry, under General French, were ready to start. Theirs was to be the first task, and Roberts, in a short speech, gave the officers their orders. Kimberley, he told them, must be relieved at once, and a dash had to be made. As the largest British cavalry division which had ever worked together, he knew they would rejoice in this opportunity given to them of maintaining their traditions. He should follow

them with the infantry, but things were desperate, and much depended on them at this moment. No matter what the difficulties or the sacrifices necessary, Kimberley must be relieved, and he felt certain they would do it.

With quiet determination, and with the knowledge that they were splendidly led by French, the long mounted procession set out, taking with them five days' rations, and behind them, marching along through dust and heat, came the steady British infantry. It was for the cavalry to clear the way to Kimberley, by riding round the Boer position, while the infantry, closely following up and making good each point won, aimed at cutting off Cronje from all connection with Bloemfontein. Finely did both arms of the service carry out their work. Speed, speed, speed! This was the watchword of the cavalry; their success depended on bewildering, on out-manœuvring the enemy, who stolidly refused to believe that any quick turning movement was dreamt of. "The English will never leave the railway," Cronje stubbornly declared.

Twenty-five miles was the distance the cavalry had set themselves to accomplish on their first day, for French's plan was to cross the Modder River at Klip Drift before the Boers knew what he aimed at doing, and therefore before they had time to bring a strong force or a number of guns to bear on him. The rapidity with which the plan had been carried out resulted in its entire success for the

Boers, taken by surprise, fled, leaving their waggons and cattle behind them, as well as a quantity of ammunition which was packed in cases labelled "Biscuits."

So the river was forded, and French waited at Klip Drift for the infantry to come up, after which he again pushed on, though now it became evident that the enemy lay in strength on the kopjes which had to be passed, and that they meant fighting. But a dashing cavalry charge on their position between two hills did its work, and broke down the last barrier to Kimberley. And then there set in drenching rain, which added one more hardship to all that was being endured by man and beast. Still there must be no delay, and the sight of Kimberley in the distance set the men off cheering, and spurred them on in spite of their weariness, after having done a hundred miles in such hot haste, with country and weather against them. General French, by means of the heliograph, sent a message to the besieged garrison, which at first they refused to take seriously, so often had the enemy attempted to mislead them. This time, however, there was to be no mistake, for a cloud of dust told its own tale. The Boers who had so long held them prisoners were galloping off with all possible speed, and that same evening French, with a few hundred of his men, rode into the town. Under his leadership, Lord Roberts's plan had been perfectly carried out, and Kimberley was saved, while of scarcely less

importance was the lesson learnt, which proved that a strong mobile force of cavalry could drive a large body of the enemy from an almost impregnable position, which they had prepared for months, and that with very little loss.

Meanwhile the infantry were nobly playing their part, marching through great heat and without water, but with dogged determination. They had absolute faith in their leader, and they meant showing what they could and would do. They captured Jacobsdal the same evening that Kimberley was relieved, and the same evening, too, saw the only misadventure which occurred during the operations. A large convoy, containing supplies for a month, was captured by the Boers from the rear, it being only protected by a small escort, so rapidly had the main force of infantry moved forward. The escort defended it gallantly, and sent to Lord Roberts begging him to order back reinforcements. It was a difficult problem for Roberts to solve on the spur of the moment. To refuse reinforcements and to abandon the convoy meant to lose a large and valuable store of supplies, but delay meant risking the chance of losing Cronje and his army, who were now being hedged in on every side. Roberts promptly decided that his main object must be adhered to—Cronje's army must be outflanked, and if possible captured; and though the loss of supplies was serious, it must be accepted as the lesser of the two evils.

Cronje was awake at last to his peril. The burghers were angry and excited; the Free Staters clamoured for retirement, anxious as they were for the safety of their farms and families. A Council of War was held, and Cronje, though still reluctant, was forced to give the order to retire towards Bloemfontein.

But he had delayed just a few hours too late to slip through the fingers of his pursuers. The cloud of dust moving from west to east in the early hours of the morning, was the signal for the chase to begin, and without a check it continued throughout the day. The blood of the British troops was up; this was the kind of fighting they knew and understood, this trial of strength and endurance in open field. This time, as the soldiers put it, they were "on the job," and though great things were demanded of them at this moment—a forced march under intense heat and on spare rations—to a man they were ready for the work.

"The excitement was intense," wrote an officer, "It was partly that, I think, which kept us all going, and partly the certainty that Roberts's luck was not going to fail him now."

French, with a quick and secret cavalry move, had got his men right up on Cronje's line of retreat, and then came the moment when the Boer general realised for the first time how desperate was his position. On the road to Bloemfontein, cutting off his retreat, was the ubiquitous French with his

cavalry, behind him came on in all haste a dense mass of British infantry; on every side he was surrounded.

Two courses only lay open to him. Should he abandon his guns and his waggons, and, with his mounted men, fight his way through General French's force, or should he entrench himself where he was at Paardeberg Drift, and trust to reinforcements from Natal, or some blunder on the part of the British, to save him from his peril? He chose the latter. In his heart he must have known that Roberts held him in the hollow of his hand, and that this was the triumph of strategy. He could not have doubted the final issue. And yet he would not try to make a dash for safety, neither would he yield.

In sullen defiance he buried himself with his men in underground trenches, and into these trenches our artillery poured a heavy fire. One desperate attempt was made to rush the Boer camp, but it was found to be too costly a venture, and when Lord Roberts came on the scene he decided that, for the moment at least, taking the camp by assault was not to be thought of. His troops were greatly exhausted, the casualties were heavy, and owing to the forced marches of the last few days, and the difficulty of fording the river, he had but little hospital equipment with him. Besides, it is characteristic of Roberts to spare his men wherever it is possible.

He said, "wait," and the worn-out soldiers waited gladly, though in the interval they beat back the force coming to Cronje's rescue.

Meanwhile the artillery bombarded the position, and still the dogged old leader held out. He asked for an armistice, nominally to bury his dead, actually to gain time and give his relieving force another chance, and this Roberts refused, though he offered to send in doctors to tend the wounded, and to find a place of safety for the women and children whom he discovered were in the laager. His last offer, however, for some inconceivable reason, Cronje declined to accept.

Inside the laager the state of things was awful, and a number of the burghers were furious with Cronje for his refusal to surrender in the face of so hopeless a position. The air was poisoned by the terrible smells from the animals which had been killed by our steady bombardment, and the Boer food supply was running short. Outside, our men suffered every conceivable hardship and discomfort, but every night they drew in a little closer and tightened their hold on Cronje and his army. February 27, the anniversary of Majuba, was close at hand, and throughout the British force there was a longing that the day might not pass without a deed of triumph to crown it. Over that day there hung a shadow, and no British soldier could rest content until it had been lifted.

Roberts hesitated to sanction any action which unnecessarily might endanger the lives of his men, but the Canadians, burning for the honour of England, begged to be allowed to carry out their plan.

Early in the morning of Majuba Day, they, supported by the Gordon Highlanders, stole forward silently through the darkness up to within eighty yards of the Boer trenches, and undismayed by the torrent of fire poured out on them at such close quarters, they fought with such skill and courage, that soon they had won a position which commanded the inside of the laager. Close at their heels were a company of Engineers, who threw up hasty entrenchments.

"A gallant deed, worthy of our Colonial comrades," said Lord Roberts.

To carry the camp by assault was made easily possible by this dashing action, and Cronje saw the game was up. It was still early dawn, when he sent a letter to Lord Roberts, surrendering unconditionally. Soon after seven, a small group made its way across towards the Army Headquarters, and thus has the whole scene been graphically described by Mr. Hands, an eye-witness:—

"The trim figure of the Chief caught my eye first. He was alone, in the little lean-to tent fixed to the side of a travelling waggon, in which he works and sleeps. His grey face, grave and thoughtful, showed no sign of elation. He looked

round, gave an order to one of his staff, and two chairs were brought out of the tent and placed under the shade of the tree. He gave another order, and half a company of Highlanders formed up in three sides of a square round the spot.

"The Chief looked carefully around, saw that everything was in order, and then walked to his tent. When he came out, he was wearing a sword. It was the first time I had seen him wearing it since the column started. But he forgets nothing, overlooks nothing, considers everything. And he had donned his sword now as a mark of respect to a fallen foe.

"Presently the body of horsemen came past the hospital tents into the camp. A heavy bundle of a man was lumped atop of a wretched bony little Boer pony.

"Was this the terrible Cronje? Was it possible that this was the man who had held back the British army at Magersfontein? . . .

"Lord Roberts stepped forward, saluted, shook hands, and handed his fallen enemy a chair.

"'You have made a gallant defence, sir; I am glad to meet so brave a foe,' was his greeting."

As might have been expected, the utmost consideration was shown to the Boer general, and his request that his wife, his grandson, and his secretary might go with him to Cape Town, was at once granted. Nor were our soldiers behind their Chief in the generous welcome they gave to that motley crowd of 4000 prisoners. They

handed them their food and what tobacco they had with the utmost cordiality, and neither did nor said anything to make them feel their position. "It delighted me," said Lord Roberts, "to see our soldiers sharing their rations of biscuits with the Boer prisoners, most of whom, poor fellows, were very hungry." When the moment came for the prisoners to leave for Cape Town, they were divided into companies under their own officers, and Cronje broke through his sullen silence at the end, so far as to admit that both he and his men had been overwhelmed with kindness.

Thus ended the fierce struggle at Paardeberg, which had lasted ten days in all, and yet it was but a fortnight since Lord Roberts had started. His brilliant strategy, well conceived and well prepared for, had succeeded beyond his highest expectations. He had in a few short days completely altered the whole position of affairs, and changed the note of disaster to one of triumph. His was the first real victory, and its results were far reaching. The Boers were staggered and demoralised; now that Roberts and French were showing them what strategy and quick movements meant, they became disheartened. Their confidence, born of many victories, deserted them, and the want of discipline in their army made itself felt. To lose 4000 men and their shrewdest general was a heavy blow to them, and they were in no mood to offer any serious resistance to Roberts as he

swept forward towards Bloemfontein, still keeping to his tactics of working round the enemy.

The relief of Ladysmith, following as it did closely on the surrender of Cronje, partly indeed as the result of it, gave fresh heart to our troops, and sent such a thrill of heartfelt thankfulness throughout the English-speaking dominions, as had not been known for many a long day.

Ladysmith had heroically suffered in silence, and Sir George White with chivalrous gallantry had refused to utter one word to reveal the sore straits in which he was with his garrison, or to hasten on by a day the movements of the relieving force. He and his brave men had "kept the flag flying," at how great a cost they allowed none but themselves to know. Twice it had seemed as if relief were close at hand; twice had the hope been dispelled. Once indeed, from outside, there had been a whisper of surrender. But the Ladysmith heliograph had proudly flashed out the words, "We have not come to that yet," and the Ladysmith garrison resolved that such a moment should never come. It might be necessary to fight their way out, even though most of them perished in the attempt, but surrender—never. Lord Roberts had promised that relief should surely come, and starved, fever-stricken and exhausted, they fought on, while they waited, as one day after another went by, and each day saw their condition growing more desperate. The crisis was near at hand. Good

indeed was the omen of the Paardeberg victory. The relieving force had fought their way up to within eight miles of Ladysmith, so that the garrison, waiting in breathless suspense as they heard the battle raging close at hand, had been cheered by a message from Buller himself, "Doing well."

During the night of February 28 the Boers retreated in the darkness from their position on Pieters Hill, and early in the morning Lord Dundonald, with some cavalry, pushed forward cautiously to reconnoitre. Then they decided to make a dash for the town, and on they rode in the twilight till they were pulled up by a familiar sound: "Halt, who goes there?"

"The Ladysmith Relief Column," was the answer. Then came a cheer which ended in a sob; the tension was over. Those weak, weary watchers gave way at last.

Yet still they cheered, with the little strength they had left, as they led the column into the town, and then followed a scene never to be forgotton by any one who took part in it. Strong men wept as if they were children, relievers and relieved broke down under the excitement of the moment. The pains and privations, the sufferings and suspense of those long months, made anything like exuberant rejoicing out of place, nor were starved trembling men able to do much more than grasp the hard brown hands of their relievers with speechless

gratitude. And in that moment, too, there came memories of those who had laid down their lives that this glorious end might come to pass; relievers and relieved both had their roll of honour, both thought of the brave hearts now stilled, who, in their different posts, had been found faithful to their duty and their honour.

"I thank God we have kept the flag flying," were the earnest, heartfelt words of Sir George White as he addressed his soldiers.

Then the sentiment uppermost in every mind took shape, and all joined in singing the National Anthem. It was the right song of thanksgiving, because it was the thought of England's Queen and England's honour which had made men brave to suffer and to do.

Seven hundred and eighty-five men had died during the siege, over eight hundred had been wounded, and many thousands had passed through the hospitals, a heavy toll indeed to pay. Yet it is by endurance such as this that the traditions of England have been built up.

"These English can conquer all things but death," muttered an old Kaffir woman in her own language, as she stood in the streets of Ladysmith on the historic day of the relief.

Meanwhile, with Ladysmith and Kimberley set free, and Mafeking declaring itself able to hold out till early in June, Roberts, with an ever-increasing number of troops at his disposal, prepared to carry

out the next stage in his scheme and to march on Bloemfontein. One of his first acts on entering the Free State was to issue a proclamation, making it clear to the people that had they remained neutral this step would never have been taken. But they had brought war into their midst by wantonly and unjustifiably invading British territory, as the result of mischievous outside influence. To those burghers, however, who ceased fighting against the British forces, he promised safety and protection of their property, and the proclamation ended by stating that if any inhabitants considered themselves unjustly treated and could prove their case, compensation would be given them. It is easy to be wise after events, and before many weeks were over it became the general opinion that in dealing with the Free Staters Lord Roberts had been too lenient and too generous, had trusted too much to their sense of fairness and honour, and had discovered too late that by allowing the Boers of the Free State on parole to go back to their homes, nearly every farm-house became a new recruiting agency and supply depôt for the enemy, thus prolonging the whole campaign. But in spite of that, I doubt if, as a nation, we shall ever regret that Lord Roberts tried by every means to deal generously with a brave enemy, and that it was only when leniency was everywhere met with treachery and deceit that sterner and more drastic measures were resorted to.

All the troops needed a rest after Paardeberg,

and besides that, the transport for the march before them had to be got ready. So it was nearly a week before a move was made. The Boer army under De Wet, now reinforced, was at Poplar's Grove, and besides being well entrenched on a line of kopjes, they had prepared an intricate scheme of wire entanglements which they believed would be fatal to British guns and cavalry. For they evidently believed that another of the old frontal attacks would be delivered. The weakness of their position lay in the fact that it was open on either flank, and grasping this, Lord Roberts hoped that by sending his cavalry to close in on the enemy's rear, while his different infantry divisions watched their right, left, and centre, that he would be able to surround them completely as at Paardeberg, with the same result.

Unfortunately on this occasion the cavalry, either from over caution, or because their horses were worn-out, came up just too late, and the infantry, after a splendid march of ten hours, arrived only to find that the enemy had slipped through their fingers. In plain words, the burghers had bolted in hot haste by the one way still open to them, Kruger and Steyn, who were with them, having driven off in a carriage to Bloemfontein. It was a great disappointment both to our men and to their Chief, and one more example of how dependent the most successful general must ever be, on the perfectly accurate carrying out by others of every part of his scheme.

"It was a great opportunity wasted, a great success foregone, a piece of perfect planning and of exquisite calculation, which came to nothing," wrote the correspondent of the *Morning Post*, who was on the spot.

"But those all too ready to censure, should have been here to witness how the great little man who leads us, took the upset of his conception and the vanishing of an action which might have laid the Free State at his feet. He stood there with a quiet smile on his face, when many another man would have been mad with anger, but speaking not a word of blame as he twisted his moustache.

"'In war you can't expect everything to come out right,' was all he had to say about the blunder. And in the strength of the smiling silence lies the greatness which we revere."

All this had happened on the 7th of March, and the 10th found our army attacking the new position taken up by the enemy at Driefontein, where they held several kopjes. Their guns, which had a much longer range than ours, did good work, and they made an obstinate stand. But the British infantry stormed the position, quite undismayed by the sheet of lead which met them, "and surged over the crest of the ridge in a fashion to make hearts which were not with them leap with envy," to quote an eye-witness. The enemy scattered before that resolute charge; to come to such close quarters with British infantry was not to their liking; and so another great

step was won on the way to Bloemfontein. Still no rest was possible. Fighting and marching all the while, Lord Roberts led his men along, determined to follow up every advantage gained, certain that he would meet with least resistance by pushing steadily forward while his foe was demoralised by the turn events had taken. Here too came in the value of disciplined over undisciplined troops. Rarely had soldiers been more hardly tried than had our men from the day they left Modder River till they marched into Bloemfontein. Long marches over a difficult country, a burning sun, cold nights, heavy thunder-storms, short rations, and overpowering thirst, these were the enemies other than the Boers, which they had faced.

But the men never failed their Chief, though it is doubtful if any one but Roberts could have led them along at that time so successfully. Their confidence in him, their conviction that he would never demand of them useless sacrifice, their knowledge that while his first idea was to win his battles, his second was to do this with the minimum of loss or suffering to them, made them willing and enthusiastic to co-operate with him in his schemes. "To see him riding about among us, looking into everything and never sparing himself, was a stimulus to us all, and we would have done anything he asked us," was the comment of a stout-hearted Colonial, whose words represented the feelings of every man in that army.

In Bloemfontein there was something very like

panic. The citizens were in terror of bombardment, and not all the entreaties of the President could prevail on them to resist. Finally when Steyn fled, no one thought of suggesting that the town should hold out, and as Lord Roberts came in sight of it, he was met by a deputation on their way to make the formal surrender, led by Mr. Fraser, who had never failed to point out to the burghers of his adopted country, the suicidal policy of fighting Great Britain.

"By the help of God and by the bravery of her Majesty's soldiers, the troops under my command have taken possession of Bloemfontein," were the simple words in which Lord Roberts telegraphed home to England, on the 13th of March, this all-important event.

At the head of his army he entered the town without pomp or ceremony. The Union Jack was hoisted in front of the official residence. The National Anthem was sung; there was some cheering on the part of the loyal inhabitants, and the children of the place crowded round those strong, travel-soiled, gentle soldiers, begging for buttons and badges in memory of the day. But that was all. It is the way with Englishmen to be reserved and undemonstrative, and sentimental considerations did not trouble the soldiers. Except for the few days rest after Paardeberg, they had marched incessantly for a month on half rations. Now it was food and rest they wanted, and having done their work doggedly

and determinedly, they saw no reason for getting excited or for crowing over their triumph. Bloemfontein was occupied, and that was enough for the moment.

Lord Roberts characteristically set to work at once, to arrange for the government of the town and the organisation of the military police, and then he went round to see what places were suitable for being turned into hospitals. On a march where everything had to be cut down, he had taken but few field hospitals with him, and he had been obliged to leave his sick and wounded in farmhouses at Driefontein, until he could send out for them from Bloemfontein. In a short time the care of the sick became a serious question, for those poisonous trenches at Paardeberg had done their work, and the men, weakened in body by their many hardships, fell ill of enteric fever in alarming numbers. The bare necessities of life for the whole army, to say nothing of hospital comforts and equipment, had to be brought up by train from Cape Town; and the Boers having destroyed the bridge at Norval's Pont, it was sixteen days after the occupation of Bloemfontein before the first railway truck came in. This could not fail to mean hardships both for the sick and the whole, as very little could be obtained in the place, and it created more than one serious difficulty for Lord Roberts. His object was to move on towards Pretoria with as little delay as possible; but no move could be

undertaken without a good reserve of supplies in hand, and fresh horses to take the place of those worn-out. "I had to go on," he says himself. "It was impossible to keep stationary. Every day our troubles were increasing all around. The enemy came down into the southern part of the colony, and they were far below Bloemfontein, right away down on the border of Cape Colony. There was therefore great anxiety about the state affairs were in, and I knew the only thing was to get well into the enemy's country and push on. Every morning I used to wake up and say, 'What supplies have we got on hand?' And the reply was, 'One day's.' There was not a single day's food to go upon, and we were troubled behind by the enemy all that month. On the 18th of April we began to accumulate food supplies at Bloemfontein, and other requirements, such as baggage, ordnance, remounts, and ammunition. From the 18th of April to the 3rd of May we accumulated a reserve of forty-five days' food at Bloemfontein, and having that, I thought I was justified in moving on to Pretoria. That is the story as regards what our means were. We were simply living from hand to mouth every day."

Lord Roberts still pursued a lenient line of policy towards the Free Staters, and every encouragement was given to those burghers who took an oath of neutrality, gave in their rifles, and undertook to go back to their farms. Never was a policy of con-

ciliation given a more liberal trial; never was it so persistently abused.

With enteric fever increasing rapidly, and many another anxiety staring him in the face, Lord Roberts had a heavy weight of responsibility on his shoulders; and though he knew that he had taken every step in his power, under these exceptional circumstances, to ensure proper care being taken of his sick soldiers, he felt deeply for the discomforts which could not be avoided. Every day saw him in and around the hospitals, cheering the men by his kindly smile and sympathetic words, showing them how dear they were to him as individuals and not only as splendid fighting machines; and as he passed all too often those long processions making for the cemetery on the hill, the soldiers who saw him always declared that "he looked so sad you might have thought each one of the poor fellows being carried along was some old friend of his own." It was sympathy of this sort, absolutely genuine and unassumed, which made Bobs the idol of all the troops he commanded in South Africa.

Two actions were fought near Bloemfontein during the halt there, one of which won for us the important ridge near Karee; while the other was a disaster, as it lost for us the Water Works, and thus increased the amount of enteric fever in the town.

In the latter case a mounted force with horse artillery had been sent eastwards to post up Pro-

clamations, and was retiring on Bloemfontein, when it fell into the most successful ambuscade which De Wet ever laid. The ground looked entirely safe, for there was only a large plain between the force and Bloemfontein, with two hills which were in our possession. But across that plain there lay a deep watercourse, and it was within this that a number of Boers lay concealed, lining the banks. Literally, our convoy walked complacently into the jaws of death. In a moment, indescribable confusion reigned; from all sides a terrific fire broke out; men, guns, and waggons were crowded together in the narrow donga, and it was a case of hand-to-hand fighting. The gunners again behaved with a coolness and gallantry which caused even the Boers to marvel. Extricating such guns as they could save from the mêlée, they got them into action and commenced firing as steadily as if neither danger nor excitement existed, and as they fell at their posts, other men stepped forward to do the work.

It was the gunners who covered the retreat of the rest of the force—a retreat which was cleverly managed by Broadwood; and the *Times* correspondent describes how, "as the mutilated remnants of the two batteries of the Horse Artillery tottered through the lines of mounted infantry, covering its withdrawal, the men could not restrain their admiration. Though it was to court death to show a hand, they leaped to their feet and cheered the

gunners as they passed." No wonder that when it came to rewarding these heroes, Lord Roberts found a difficulty in selecting those to recommend for the Victoria Cross where all had earned it, and the problem was only solved by the men in the battery being left to elect their representatives for the honour.

But looked at in any light, and many different versions of the disaster have been given, the loss of the Water Works, and the loss of the guns, besides the 150 killed and wounded, and the 400 prisoners taken, was very serious, and greatly damaged the position of our army in the Free State.

CHAPTER XVII

IN PRETORIA, AND AFTERWARDS

On May 3rd the main army left Bloemfontein on the way north, Lord Roberts having steadily refused to move, in spite of the harassing tactics adopted by the enemy, until his troops were in a condition to strike effectively, and his lines of communication were amply guarded. Encouraged by their success at Sanna's Post, the Boers had been on the alert, and had hemmed in the garrison at Wepener, which was made up of hard-fighting colonial soldiers, who held their own magnificently until relieved. But De Wet's army, knowing the lie of the land and able to collect food as they went along, moved too quickly, and could break up too easily to be overtaken and captured. Lord Roberts's object, therefore, remained that of driving the enemy before him from one position to another, and in so doing he met with very little opposition. It was a case of the Boers retreating as he advanced, or, as a correspondent neatly put it, "we marched forward and the Boers backward, they dropping a few shells at us over their shoulders. Our infantry steadily marched their twenty miles a day, 'winning their way,' it has

THE STAFF AT PRETORIA

By permission of W. Nissen, Pretoria

been said, 'at the expense of their boots, and not of their lives.'"

At Kroonstadt, the new Boer capital, it was fully expected the enemy would make a stand. But no; the elusive Steyn fled, contenting himself with stating that Lindley was to be the new capital, and Lord Roberts entered Kroonstadt on May 12, with as little opposition as if he were a M.F.H. riding through an English country town on the way home after a day's hunting. For a few days a halt was made at Kroonstadt, then once more it was a case of "Forward."

But though Lord Roberts had no hard battles to fight on the way, he had to take many a risk. To guard satisfactorily his ever-increasing lines of communication meant weakening his army, and yet it was on the safety of those lines that his force depended for its whole supply of food and ammunition. So critical was this matter of supplies, that on May 27, when the army was still some miles from Johannesburg, Lord Roberts had only the food for one day in hand.

If, as might be reasonably expected, the Boers resolved to fight in defence of this Golden City, our troops would be threatened with starvation, and half-starved men cannot win battles. This was not the time for any plan of campaign which meant delay.

The enemy, with several guns, were on a strong position near Klip River Berg. It was absolutely

necessary that they should be dislodged at once, and to the Gordon Highlanders fell the honour of delivering the main attack; which they did in a manner worthy of their best traditions, though at the cost of eight officers and ninety men. They were well supported by the C.I.V.'s, those volunteers of London who won for themselves the right to be looked on as veterans when it came to fighting.

And thus the road to Johannesburg was thrown open, and on May 31 the Union Jack was hoisted in the Market Square.

Still there was something left to be done, and Roberts had to take another risk. Short of food as he was, with not even one day's rations to the good, he decided to move on to Pretoria.

"While fully recognising the dangers attending the advance, I considered the advantages of following up without delay the successes we had achieved, and not giving the enemy time to recover their several defeats or to remove the British prisoners from Pretoria, quite justified the risk being run," he said.

So on the 3rd of June he advanced. Stories of Pretoria, with its underground trains of dynamite and its strong defences, had caused our men to regard it almost as an impregnable place.

And moreover, was not Kruger there himself, and would not the man who had brought on the war encourage his burghers to hold out resolutely to the bitter end? Surely the resistance

at Pretoria would be stubborn indeed, and here would the burghers make their last stand, as men at bay, fighting for their very existence. So thought the soldiers as they talked of siege trains and howitzers.

Then after all nothing happened. Kruger fled towards Delagoa Bay with two millions of money, leaving his wife behind him (an unconscious tribute to the chivalry of British troops), and his flight was followed by an unconditional surrender of the town.

The ending was tame enough indeed, yet the day did not pass without stirring incidents, and splendid was the sight of the troops, drawn from every part of Great Britain, and from every colony over the seas, as they marched past the Chief who had brought them here victorously, and lined the Market Square, cheering the two things most dear to them, the Union Jack and their leader, "Bobs"!

"I shall rise again" had been the words, painted half in irony, half in prophecy, on the coffin of the British flag when the mock funeral had taken place.

And now the Union Jack floated over the Market Square, saluted reverently by every soldier who stood there, from Lord Roberts himself to the prisoners just set free, welcomed by the little band of loyal men and women who, though it tarried, had waited patiently and confidently for the day when it would be granted to them to behold once more that sacred symbol of liberty.

"I am very thankful," was the simple comment of Lord Roberts on this eventful day.

In England, the rejoicings over the relief of Mafeking had barely died away, when the news came that both Johannesburg and Pretoria had surrendered to Lord Roberts. The tension through all those first weary months of disappointment and defeat had been acute, but from the moment Lord Roberts took over the reins at Modder River there was a settled conviction that all would go well. Nothing could have been finer than the behaviour of the general public during the war. Disasters and misfortunes had only served to knit the whole nation together; old differences, old prejudices, were swept away, so that men and women of every class joined hands in their determination to do their duty at this crisis in the nation's history.

It was but natural, therefore, that after so great a strain they should be a little too hopeful and believe a little too readily that the occupation of Pretoria meant the end of the war. At one time, indeed, there were hopes that it might have been so, for Botha was approached on the subject of peace, and it was evident that his feeling was in favour of surrender. But Christian De Wet, nicknamed by the soldiers the "Flying Fox," had to be reckoned with, an audacious and clever fighter, who had eyes which never failed to notice the weak points in the British position,

and a fund of resources which enabled him to take full advantage of every opening.

It was the long single line of railway from Cape Town to Pretoria, which gave him rare opportunities for carrying on that guerilla warfare, which is far more difficult to outwit than any other method of campaigning. Lord Roberts had defended his line of railway strongly; every station, bridge, and culvert was guarded, but still there remained many miles which could not be touched. And nothing was easier than for De Wet, with some of his followers, to swoop down from their hiding-places among the hills, or more often from some professedly neutral farmhouse, under cover of darkness, and attack one weak spot after the other.

This was the kind of fighting which went on for many a month to come, and it must be remembered that De Wet had everything in his favour. The very smallness of his force helped him, for in the daytime it could break up and disperse, while the country, with its innumerable hiding-places, was in itself a powerful ally. Villages were attacked, convoys were captured, trains were burned, supplies were seized, telegraph wires were cut, dynamite was laid, and the line was frequently torn up at many points. And though one general after another tried his hand, De Wet always managed to slip through their fingers, thanks to his own common sense, aided by a reckless audacity and a fair share of good luck.

Needless to say, his successes encouraged the burghers to hold out, and after a few days' talk about peace negotiations, Botha informed Lord Roberts that his army meant fighting on to the end.

The Boer commandant was at Pienaar's Poort, within a few miles of Pretoria, so Roberts, although his force was weak in numbers and his horses were in an unsatisfactory condition, resolved to attack him and drive him out by a series of the flanking operations which always baffled the Boers. French's cavalry, Hutton's mounted infantry, with the infantry divisions of Pole-Carew and Ian Hamilton, all took part in the fight at Diamond Hill, which lasted stubbornly for two days, at the end of which Botha retired. The cavalry, which had done especially well on this occasion, were unluckily not able to follow up the enemy in close pursuit, but in spite of that, very material advantages had been gained, and the Boers had been made to realise how useless it was for them to attempt standing against superior numbers and disciplined troops. Lord Roberts now saw that he was crippled for want of horses, and that until remounts could be sent up to him he must remain inactive. So there followed a long rest at Pretoria, and it was the end of July before he moved again; then it was eastwards, and Middelburg, an important town along the Delagoa Bay Railway, was occupied. The events of the next few weeks, which resolved themselves into a number of small

operations having for their object the hunt after De Wet and the dispersing of the only organised Boer army now in the field under Botha, need not be described at length.

At the end of August Lord Roberts met General Buller and General French at Belfast, a town still farther east than Middelburg, near which place Botha made another stand. Once again he was turned out from his position, and so thoroughly was he beaten that Lord Roberts now considered himself justified in issuing a proclamation, which stated that from henceforth the Transvaal would form part of her Majesty's dominions. A few days afterwards the burghers heard that Kruger had left them to their fate, and had placed himself under Portuguese protection at Lorenzo Marques. It was a bitter pill for them to swallow, and many in disgust laid down their arms. But there were still some who refused to surrender, and thus, although the war was practically over, in so far as they had not the faintest hopes of winning back all they had lost, they would not hear of peace negotiations, and events dragged wearily on. Lord Roberts was persistently optimistic, and although the failure of his early attempts at lenient treatment had made him disinclined to trust the oaths of neutrality and professions of friendship made by the burghers, he still refused to press hardly on a conquered foe, and trusted to time to soften down the bitter feeling which existed. A cowardly attempt to kidnap him

was discovered in Pretoria in August, and when it was found that the chief part in it was played by a German officer serving with the Boers, who was out on parole, the indignation of the British soldiers knew no bounds.

Their behaviour in every town occupied had been exemplary, but breaches of faith of this kind irritated them greatly, and it speaks well for their discipline that while inwardly chafing at the treachery disclosed when the plot was discovered, they kept perfect order. Hans Cordua was tried and sentenced to be shot, and it was well known how painful it was to Roberts to sign his death-warrant. Had it been possible he would have spared his life, but plots of this sort, unless promptly put down, might easily endanger hundreds of lives, and it was evident that the enemy were trading on the leniency which had hitherto been shown.

All day long in Pretoria the Chief was hard at work, as active and energetic as if he were a subaltern who had never known the strain of heavy responsibility. The care of the sick and the comfort of his men occupied much of his consideration, and he went into all the details concerning the management of the Hospitals and Soldiers' Institutes, anxious that nothing should be left undone which could mitigate the hardships and discomforts endured by the brave soldiers who had served him so well.

As ragged dusty divisions came in for supplies

or fresh clothing, it was the Chief who rode out to meet them, and their weary walk turned to a swinging march at the sight of that little man, who welcomed them with a smile of approval.

Or did a Colonial regiment arrive, Bobs would be there to greet them, in a few tactful words making them feel that however anxious they were to get back to their homes and occupations, they would stay and fight for just as long as he wanted them. And he drew from them cheers which meant something more than cheers.

Or was it the case, as with the C.I.V.'s, that some lucky regiment was set free to go back to England, it was Bobs who addressed them in the grey dawn and sent them on their way his devoted followers for life. To every one he said exactly the right thing, and that from the pure goodness of his heart. Of more far-reaching influence too among the men than any sermon, was the example he set them in matters of religion. There was no ostentation, no preaching, and yet every one instinctively felt that here was a good man who looked daily to God for strength and guidance in carrying out the duties laid upon him, and who set before himself as his ideal, the life of the Christian warrior.

All those years of a soldier's life, of coming in constant contact with the inevitable results of war, had failed to harden him or make him indifferent to suffering. Never could he hear unmoved of any

man being killed or wounded, and many a home in England, from the highest to the humblest, has had cause to remember him gratefully for the letters or telegrams he sent when they were in anxiety about some one dear to them. Himself ideally happy in his home life, he was always full of tender sympathy for those left behind in England, and he never forgot all that home meant to each individual soldier. Every mail brought him hundreds of letters all in the same strain, begging for news of a son, husband, or brother, and each one was carefully answered after the fullest inquiries, often involving much trouble, had been made. When a great personal anxiety fell on him in the shape of the serious illness of his eldest daughter, his constant companion and helper, the men felt as if the sorrow had fallen upon themselves, and each day's bulletin was anxiously awaited.

Already Lord Roberts had been made Commander-in-Chief, and it was thought desirable that as soon as possible he should go back to England to take up work which was of the utmost importance. For the war had shown up many a weak spot and many a serious flaw in the working of the army, and it was felt that with the memory of these still fresh, changes and reforms should be made without delay. Who so fit to advise on all these important points as Lord Roberts, who possessed the confidence in a unique degree of

the nation, and whose talent for grappling with details was only equalled by his capacity for hard work? Lord Kitchener was admirably qualified to take over the reins in South Africa, and so, on his daughter's recovery, Lord Roberts handed the command to him and started for Cape Town.

His farewell order to the army ran as follows:—

"Being about to give up the command of the army in South Africa into the able hands of General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, I feel I cannot part with the comrades with whom I have been associated for many a year, often under very trying circumstances, without giving expression to my profound appreciation of the noble work they have performed for their Queen and country and for me personally, and to my pride in the results they have achieved by their pluck and endurance, their discipline and devotion to duty.

"I greatly regret that the ties which have bound us together are so soon to be severed, for I should like to remain with the army until it is completely broken up; but I have come to the conclusion that, as Lord Kitchener has consented to take over the command, my presence is no longer required in South Africa, and that my duty calls me in another direction. But I shall never forget the officers and men of this force, be they Royal Navy, Colonials, Regulars, Militia, Yeomanry, or Volunteers, their interests will always be very dear to me, and I shall continue to work for the army as long as I can work at all.

"The service which the South African force has performed is, I venture to think, unique in the annals of war, inasmuch as it has been almost incessant for a whole year, in some cases more than a year. There has been no rest—no days off to recruit—no going into winter quarters, as in other campaigns which have extended over a long period.

"For months together, in fierce heat, in biting cold, and in pouring rain, you—my comrades—have marched and fought without a halt, and bivouacked without shelter from the elements, and you frequently have had to continue marching with your clothes in rags and your boots without soles—time being of such great consequence that it was impossible for you to remain long enough in any one place to refit.

"When not engaged in actual battle, you have been continually shot at from behind kopjes by an invisible enemy, to whom every inch of the ground was familiar, and who, from the peculiar nature of the country, were able to inflict severe punishment while perfectly safe themselves.

"You have forced your way through dense jungles and over precipitous mountains, through and over which, with infinite manual labour, you have had to drag and haul guns and ox-waggons. You have covered, with almost incredible speed, enormous distances, and that often on a very short supply of food: and you have endured the sufferings, inevit-

able in war to sick and wounded men far from the base, without a murmur, even with cheerfulness. You have, in fact, acted up to the highest standard of patriotism, and by your conspicuous kindness and humanity towards your enemies, and your forbearance and good behaviour in the towns we have occupied, you have caused the army of Great Britain to be as highly respected, as it must henceforth be greatly feared, in South Africa.

"Is it any wonder that I am intensely proud of the army I have commanded, or that I regard you —my gallant and devoted comrades—with affection as well as admiration, and that I feel deeply the parting from you? Many of you—Colonials as well as Britishers—I hope to meet again, but those I may never see more will live in my memory and be held in high regard to my life's end.

"I have learnt much during the war, and the experience I have gained will greatly help me in the work that lies before me, which is, I conceive, to make the army of the United Kingdom as perfect as it is possible for an army to be. This I shall strive to do with all my might.

"And now, farewell! May God bless every member of the South African army, and that you may be all spared to return to your homes to find those dear to you well and happy, is the earnest hope of your Commander.

"ROBERTS, Field-Marshal."

In Natal and Cape Colony Lord Roberts was met with an outburst of spontaneous enthusiasm. Here was the man who, on his arrival, had found both Colonies in a position of the utmost peril, and who had conceived and carried out that brilliant and effective plan of campaign which had saved them, and which had settled the vexed question of British supremacy in South Africa. It seemed to the loyal population that no welcome could be good enough as a token of their gratitude to this brave man. Simply and modestly as is his wont, Lord Roberts acknowledged their enthusiasm in a series of charming little addresses, in which he touched on some of the greater issues at stake, and showed what he meant by the spirit of Imperialism. For himself he disclaimed any right to accepting all the credit, but on one point he admitted to a feeling of pride and satisfaction.

"I hold a unique position for a Field-Marshal of the United Kingdom," he said. "For I am the first to have had the privilege to command an Imperial army, formed of representatives from all parts of her Majesty's dominions, bound together by one common aim and object—to uphold the honour of the Mother Country, and to die if need be for her interests. Never has a mother had more reason to be proud of her valiant sons than England has to-day. Never has the truth of the old adage, 'Blood is thicker than water,' been better exemplified. And so we stand, and please God shall continue to

stand, a united world-wide Empire, bound together by ties of blood, of friendship, and an equal love of justice and of truth, ready now, henceforth, and for ever, to fulfil the glorious destiny of our race. For myself I shall ever remember with the utmost pride and pleasure my association with the grand men I have had the privilege to command. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for their bravery, their devotion, their fortitude, and their unexampled discipline. I am deeply sensible of what all ranks have done for the cause of liberty and justice, and for what they have done for me personally I am more grateful than words can express."

In a farewell speech at Cape Town he struck yet a deeper note. "I shall watch with the utmost eagerness the settlement of the country, its development, and its unification, and on this head I would crave permission to say a few words. The prosperity and the well-being of South Africa do not depend upon the action, the ability, or the governing power of any one man, so much as upon the cordial co-operation of the various nationalities by whom it is inhabited. The Dutch and the English must work together without distinction of race, religion, or sentiment, if they wish to see this country contented and flourishing. And it will be my proudest boast if I can claim to have done nothing, under the stress of war's stern necessities, to hinder the friendly feeling which I trust may be

established between the two races, or prevent their hearty co-operation in their efforts for the good government of the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony.

"We must forgive and try to forget all that would encourage bitterness of feeling or tend to transmit to succeeding generations the idea that anything remains to be atoned for on either side.

"Nor must we neglect the lessons that the war has taught us.

"God has given into our hands a great heritage, for which we have been called upon to pay a heavy price in the blood of our dearest and our best.

"We must not in the future be negligent of our trust as we have been in the past. We must strive to be able, when called upon, to give a good account of our stewardship. We must be watchful, strong, and of a good courage; and we must try to think not so much of the glory of conquest, as of the many responsibilities conquest imposes upon the conquerors, lest we forget that which alone makes war justifiable and conquest laudable—the good of the many, the better government of the conquered country, and the establishment within its borders of justice, mercy, liberty, and truth. Three years ago that Imperial-minded poet, Rudyard Kipling called upon us to remember that there were other duties besides that of national glorification; and in words breathing forth all that is best in patriotism and Imperialism, he sounded a solemn note of

warning, which I cannot do better than recall to your memory—

"'God of our Fathers! Known of old!
Lord of our far-flung battle line!
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine,
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget.'"

It was a noble speech, and one which created a deep impression upon all who heard it, for it came from a man who had made his name famous on many a battlefield, and yet who looked on every victory won as the beginning, and not as the end of the work to be accomplished, who placed on the highest possible level those ideals which ought to inspire the men who fight under the flag of England. And in the years to come, when it is possible to value it in its true proportions, the work of one, whose whole life has been devoted ungrudgingly to the service of that Empire of which he has ever had so lofty a conception, it is certain that words such as these, and his consistent translation of these great sentiments into actions which embodied them, will stand out as among the greatest services Lord Roberts has rendered to his country.

His welcome back to England was naturally a warm one, though the fact that the campaign was not yet over prevented anything like public rejoicings on a large scale. Indeed, it was Lord Roberts himself who refused to be fêted while the sorrows of

war hung over the land. But it must always be with a thrill of pride, that he will remember how Queen Victoria, then herself standing on the threshold of the Valley of Death, insisted on personally giving him her thanks for the work he had accomplished. "I must see Lord Roberts," she said, when those around her spoke to her of rest. And though after events crowned that interview with a pathos which makes it sacred, it will for ever remain to Lord Roberts a dearly prized memory.

He reached London at noon on a dull January day, and that same evening saw him at the War Office taking over his new work.

No easy task lies before him. Army reform is in the air, and the path of the reformer is always a hard one. But of this we may be sure, that into the work Lord Roberts will bring that devotion to duty, that singleness of purpose, that mastery of detail, that unfailing common sense, and that large-heartedness which have marked every step of his career, which have won for him the love as well as the confidence of the nation, and the remembrance of which causes a smile to light up the face of every private soldier, as he sums the whole matter up in the words—

"There is no one like little Bobs, and the best you can say of him isn't half good enough."

Printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co.
Edinburgh & London

00024514

Digitized with financial assistance from

HT Parekh FOUNDATION

An Initiative by HDFC

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on 15 October, 2018